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4:48pm, October 6, 1971—Late Afternoon on Christopher Street by Ted White

Commuter Special by Richard E. Peck

and the conclusion of *The Wrong End of Time* by John Brunner



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JANUARY, 1972**Vol. 45, No. 5**

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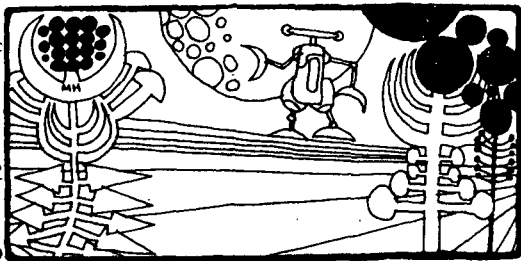
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TED
WHITE
EDITORIAL



BEFORE ME ON MY DESK is a recent (October, 1971) issue of *Playboy*, a book (B. F. Skinner's *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*), and a copy of the Washington *Evening Star* from more than a week ago.

In *Playboy*, Poul Anderson offers a vision of the near future which, in article form, describes the same world he portrayed in his novel, *The Byworlder* (FANTASTIC, June and August, 1971 and now a Signet book).

Skinner, long dean of Behaviorists, proposes an end to the delusion of freedom, and a utopia of positively-reinforced conformity to "goodness."

And in the news Dr. Kenneth Clark, president of the American Psychological Association, is suggesting that the world's leaders should be doped to reduce their "aggressive behavior."

It's hard to know how to regard it all. Obviously, the science fiction writer (Anderson) is in closer touch with human reality than either Skinner or Clark. But, for heaven's sake—why?

Let's just consider, for a moment, a theory of mine (White's Eighty-Second Theorem): *Most professionals can't see beyond their own noses.* And its corollary: *Science fiction writers, to the extent that they are generalists in the pursuit of knowledge, make better sense than authorities in specialized fields.*

There is something pathetic about a man of world renown, an "expert" on behavior, a scientist, making a statement like

this: "Consider a woman who has a baby. It cost her a lot of pain and trouble to have it. But she didn't design that baby; it was all settled at the moment of conception what the baby was going to be like. The same thing is true when a man writes books, invents things, manages a business. He didn't initiate anything. It's all the effect of past history on him. That's the truth, and we have to get used to it."

That statement, from Skinner's book, is *not* the truth, of course. It is an opinion. Worse, it is an *uninformed* opinion. A little less time with the rats and the pigeons and a little more awareness of the world in which he lives could easily have told Skinner this.

Consider that woman and her baby, indeed: If she is healthy, genuinely healthy, and without any physiological impediment to normal delivery, the baby should not "cost her a lot of pain and trouble." Any man who is also a father, if he has involved himself at all in the labor of his wife and the delivery of their child, knows this. One can only guess Skinner took the more traditional out and left his wife to her own devices, ignorance, and—undoubtedly—the poor health of bad nutrition.

Consider the baby: it was not "all settled at the moment of conception what the baby was going to be like"—and if indeed it were, this would be an argument against Skinner's own theories of environmental influence. Fact: only the approximation

(Continued on page 125)

AMAZING STORIES

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TED WHITE

"That gross man-mountain of a seedy detective," Ronald Archer returns—to armageddon. He prefers his adventures to be more mundane in nature, but those which are recorded in print have each verged on the apocalyptic: Sideslip (Pyramid Books, 1968), "Wednesday, Noon" (F&SF, Feb., 1968), and "It Could Be Anywhere" (FANTASTIC, Oct., 1969). This one begins at—

4:48 PM, OCTOBER 6, 197—:

LATE AFTERNOON ON CHRISTOPHER STREET

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

I SAT ON THE FLOOR and cradled the big M-1 rifle in my arms. The tiled floor was cold; my butt was already numb. I lit another cigarette, took two drags, and stubbed it out, flicking it against the base of the corridor wall. It disappeared into the litter on the floor.

I knew they were down there, somewhere. I could hear the shots out in the street from time to time, and the stench of teargas came in through the broken windows of the airshaft whenever the still air shifted a little. I knew they were down there, and all I could do was to sit here, hold my big, clumsy gun, and hope they wouldn't come in this building. Or, if they came in, that they would give up before climbing all five flights of stairs.

After all, what was there for them in this particular crummy tenement, in a block of crummy tenements?

Behind me, through the open door, Marcia moaned.

"... Archer—?"

"I'm here, honey. I'm still here."

"I musta been asleep. . . ."

"Yeah." I spoke softly, over my shoulder. There was no reason to think anyone was within earshot, but I'm a naturally cautious man.

"What's going on?" I heard the springs of the couch creak from the livingroom beyond the door.

"You stay in there," I said. "You lie down. Nothin's going on, not in this building, anyway." The gunfire was a hollow popping sound in the distance, but once in a while a shot would come from somewhere closer: a sharp stinging whiplash crack or the boom of a .45. The narrow street set up weird echoes. You couldn't tell what was going on out there unless you put your head out a front window. That, I wasn't about to do. I'd put back both doors on the front apartments, as solid as I could, just as a sort of buffer, for like if they lobbed a tear gas canister in through a front window, for instance.

I heard the crunch of her shoe in the broken glass, and whipped my head

around. "Dammit, Marcia—!"

"I got scared," she said, sinking down onto her heels in the cleared area of the floor beside me. She peered down through the railing. "So dark down there, how you gonna tell if somebody come up those stairs?"

The day was dying. The light even on this floor, above the neighboring buildings, was gloomy. Marcia's face was dusky in silhouette against the hall windows. "Without you making so much noise," I said, "I can hear anybody that comes." But I gave her a forced grin, to take the sting out. "How you feeling?" I asked.

"Hot. I feel all hot," she said. "I'm sweating like a—" she almost said 'pig'.

"You got a fever," I told her. I could feel it when she was this close: heat, radiating from her pores. When I looked closer I saw her blouse was sticking to her skin. "You get back in there and lie down. With the blanket, you understand? On top of everything else, you want a case of pneumonia?"

"I'm scared, in there by myself, nothing to listen to but those guns," she said. "Wish they hadn't of taken the tv," she added, mostly to herself.

"Wouldn't do you a lot of good," I said. "Not with the power off. But if you want something to keep you company, take this—" I fished a \$3.95 transistor job out of my jacket pocket and tossed it to her. "Don't worry about keeping it quiet; the batteries are almost dead anyway."

"Thanks," she said, underlying it with sarcasm. But then, "Hey, I'm sorry, Archer. You're okay."

"Get back under that blanket," I said.

"I'm not bleeding any more," she said. She was lingering, unwilling to



go back inside."

"Good. That much I'm glad-for," I said.

"Look, do you hafta sit out here like this?" she asked. "No kidding."

As if in answer, the staccatto of a machine gun opened up outside. It sounded damned close. I heard it from both the stairwell and the airshaft windows. There was an after-echo of breaking, smashing sounds from below in the same duh-duh-duh-duh rhythm.

I peeled Marcia's sudden grip on my arm loose as gently as I could, and stroked her thick, coarse hair for a moment. Her forehead was hot, and running with sweat. "Inside, honey."

"They comin' in!"

"No they're not. Just raking down the building front, that's all."

"Sweet Jesus, I'm so scared—"

I reached out a hand to the railing and with a grunt and a groan I pulled myself up onto my feet. My ass was one big, cold, dead area. I towered over Marcia. I put my arm on her shoulder, holding the M-1 under my other arm. It was all we had.

She was shaking.

"Come on, honey. I'll take you inside, okay?" I needed the stretch, anyway.

The doorway was a dark hole, loose hinges hanging on the left side to a splintered frame. I'd leaned the door against the wall by the stairs. We stepped over the broken glass into a short narrow hallway, past the bathroom, and into the livingroom. It was a squarish arpartment, a little unusual for a lower Manhattan tenement. To the left, French doors led into a narrow bedroom. To the right, the kitchen. Straight ahead, beyond the livingroom, double French doors and

another large room. Its windows faced to the west, across the interior of the block, and all the glass was, mercifully, intact. Beyond the rooftops the sun was a squat orange yolk, sinking into the blue-gray haze of New Jersey.

I'd put Marcia on the couch in the livingroom because the bed in the bedroom looked like someone had gotten sick in it. I'd swept up the debris the looters had left behind as well as the stub of an old broom had allowed, and chucked the junk into the bedroom. The glass in its French door was all smashed out, of course, but I'd hung a sheet that hadn't been too badly ripped over the door before closing it, and that closed the room off pretty well.

Marcia sank down on the couch with obvious relief, then hiked up her brief skirt to point at the white bandage on her upper thigh. It stood out like a flag of truce in the gloom. "See? No blood."

I laughed, a short low bark. "Okay, honey; okay."

She pouted. "I thought you'd want to see."

"Honey, I've seen everything a girl your age has got."

She began fiddling with the transistor radio as if she hadn't heard me at all. I stared for a moment at her thighs, then picked up the blanket. She'd been next to unconscious when I'd cleaned her up, and tied up her wound. The bullet had hit her high on the inside front of her right thigh, passed through the flesh outside her thighbone, and exited a little below her right buttock. I had to look for the point of entry, but the exit was a nasty gouge thick with blood that was still running down her leg. At that, she'd been lucky.

Not one of your lookers, Marcia. A

little too tall for her age—mid-teens, I gathered—and a little too long in the legs. A narrow face, prominent teeth. Nose flattened, eyes large and soft and questioning when she'd looked at me through her pain; a skinny figure, but still curved in a female way. If what was between her legs was what I wanted, I'd had my chances earlier, her skirt up around her waist and her right leg propped up so I could get at it.

But just a kid! Pink panties, a little stained in the crotch; smelly socks in worn loafers. Just a kid, and lying there in the daze of her pain while I applied my clumsy first-aid to the bullet-wound in her leg, cleaned up the blood, and cursed to myself under my breath.

“—still rioting, completely out of control,” came a tinny voice. “*National Guard and federal troops are being rushed into the area, but there is deep concern that—*”

Marcia twisted the knob. “—appears to cover most of Northern New Jersey, Metropolitan New York City, and parts of Long Island and Westchester County. In this spontaneous uprising, rioting seems to be spreading like some terrible epidemic, a contagion flashing into conflagration in every heavily populated area. It is feared that the nation's other major cities will soon be swept with uprisings of their own—”

“Panic breeds mixed metaphors,” I said to myself. I wondered how it was that newscasters sitting in their ivory observation towers always seemed to fly into an erudite panic. Maybe it was a luxury they could afford.

“Isn't there *nothing* besides this crap?” Marcia said.

“—I repeat: citizens must remain calm—”

“Hah!” she snapped the set off.

“Shut up!” I whispered, raising my right hand. “Listen—”

“They in the building!” she breathed, eyes widening.

I moved my bulk out to the stairway fast as I could, the rifle rigid in my tense hands. I kicked something.

It sounded like a broken dish. It went skittering out across the tiled floor of the corridor and bounced through the widely spaced banisters of the railing. When it struck the stairs, it smashed. The sounds echoed in the stairwell. I held my breath; my pulse hammered in my hears.

“Hey, Paul! You hear that?”

“Yeah. Somethin' upstairs.”

The voices weren't in the downstairs hall; they were up at least one flight already. *So fast! I turn my back one minute, and—*

“Somebody's up there.” It wasn't much of a whisper; in the plaster-and-tile stairway it carried easily.

“Maybe a rat. I seen rats in these buildings.” That one didn't even bother to whisper.

I thought about the Negro girl in the apartment, lying on a couch with a hole in her leg: a girl I hadn't known four hours ago. I thought about my own apartment, a block over, on 10th Street, near Hudson, rifled and looted, my tv gone, my stereo preamp gone but the big black amplifier still there, wires dangling. I thought about my books, my collection of old, rare books, lying in sodden heaps all over the floor, shards of busted quart beer bottles—I bought them by the case—lying among them. The stench, and the turn my stomach had taken: big dumb Joes like me aren't supposed to have fine things; we're not supposed to feel anything like that.

And I was just dumb-lucky I wasn't dead. Dead, or running in a blind panic like so many others, driven before the rioting mob, running and maybe getting shot or trampled to death.

Lucky I'd holed up; lucky for Marcia I'd found her, too.

I thought about it, and then I checked out the gun. Big gun. Ugly, nothing fine or beautiful about it like a modern sporting rifle. Heavy, more than nine pounds of dead weight, not like a modern M-16 or one of your other new lightweight automatic rifles. But a good piece. I'd learned to use one in 1943. It felt right.

Safety off, full clip—eight rounds. Cocked and ready.

I saw their heads, first: the white crash helmets, goggles pushed up and gas masks hanging over one shoulder. Their dark uniforms were lost in the shadows, but I could see those helmets fine.

Then one of them flashed a torch up the stairs: up my flight of stairs. I crouched back where the next flight began: the stairs to the roof. I would be behind them as they climbed the stairs. I crouched on one knee, and braced the rifle across my other leg. Close quarters: I wouldn't have to aim too carefully.

They were cautious. One of them pointed the torch down at the stair-steps, at the broken dish. It was a bright yellow, and lay in three triangular pieces. The other one, behind him, was mostly a hulking shadow, but I could see he was holding some kind of gun. Maybe—inside, I chuckled mordantly—a riot gun. I waited for them to move up the stairs.

They say that when you're holding a bead on someone that sometimes he

senses it, feels it in his mind. Crap, maybe: I dunno. But when they were three quarters of the way up the stairs, the one with the light suddenly turned and flashed it at me.

Maybe he saw me—maybe he didn't. I didn't hesitate. The gun bucked viciously in my hands as I squeezed the trigger, and kept on squeezing it, my finger tightening in rapid spasms.

I deliberately missed the torch. It fell, rolled, and came to rest facing down the stairs. The beam transfixed the second cop. His eyes were wide, his face wild; he swung towards me.

The noise of my gun was deafening in the confined corridor and stairwell. I didn't stop firing; the heavy bullets lifted the cop's helmet from his head, added a new series of holes to his face, made his wavy red-blond hair dance, and cut through the jugular vein in his neck. The blood was still spraying from it in great ragged spurts after my clip was empty, and the noise had stopped.

My ears rang as I listened intently for sounds of anyone else down below. Eight shots, triggered as fast as I could get them off—a tiny slice of time, but now that it was over, I felt like hours had passed in that frantic moment. I climbed to my feet again, and I felt intoxicated: adrenalated and alive with bitter satisfaction.

With revenge.

Two less of the bloody bastards. *Two less.*

I climbed over a body and picked up the torch, snapping it off. *Where had it really started?* I wondered. With the illegal New York police strike two months ago? With the enactment of Universal Gun Registration, and their smug certainty that we'd been unarmed? Maybe in Chicago, back in

(Continued on page 27)

AMAZING STORIES

Richard Peck's "The Man Who Faded Away" appeared recently in our companion magazine, FANTASTIC (June, 1971). Now he returns with a grim forecast in which Max Ten-Smith struggles with the—

COMMUTER SPECIAL

RICHARD E. PECK

Illustrated by DAVE COCKRUM

MAX TEN-SMITH shuffled awkwardly from the subwalk's speeding mid-strip to the slow-strip as he neared his train platform. He accidentally jostled a young woman who glared at him but maintained proper silence. Rounding the curve, they both skipped to the loading platform at the same instant, and he trod on her instep.

"Sorry," he muttered.

"You ought to be. A new pair of shoes and..."

QUIET PLEASE. NO TALKING.

The Voice crackled in their ears, and several heads swung their way in anger as all the other commuters entering the station flinched at the sound lancing through their concentration.

The young woman ducked instinctively and clapped a hand to her public ear. "Ohhhhhh!"

Max leaned closer and whispered, "It gets louder as you get older," then grinned at the hate-filled glare she threw him.

He dropped back three places in line and fell in behind another man before shuffling forward once more toward the loading ramps. One of the omnipresent car-touts waved a printed list in his face, but Max shoved him away angrily. He tried to avoid ever seeing

one of the tout's time-tables. Ghouls like that disgusted him, making their living by collecting and publishing the lists of worker-eliminations.

It wasn't even legal, though The Voice overlooked it. Since commuters were determined to buy the lists, legal or not, The Voice tacitly sanctioned the slimy peddlers who stayed off the dole by selling them. So long as official doctrine still preached free enterprise, to force the car-touts out of business would hardly square with announced policy.

The queue shuffled forward another fifteen feet as the 6:05 pulled from the station. Max could recall his grandfather's complaints about trains that never ran on time. At least that problem had been solved. Every five minutes one of the stainless steel tubes hissed from the Washington station. Delay was unthinkable. Even a slight lag in departure time would throw off each subsequent train until lost seconds accumulated into minutes. And lost minutes meant collision—the certain deaths of all two thousand commuters in the pair of driverless trains which hurtled through the underground darkness at 180 mph. But such an accident was inconceivable; The Voice

would see to that. Two hundred deaths remained the legal simultaneous maximum (although Max had heard a report of two cars on the same train chosen for elimination—*probably a lie*, he assured himself).

KEEP THE LINE MOVING, PLEASE.

Max glanced around guiltily, but saw that he had maintained the proper two-foot interval on the man ahead in line. Somewhere behind him a dawdler had drawn the rebuke, heard by all of them of course. A Senator had recently introduced a bill to make the newest ear-inserts selective, different frequencies for different occupations, or age groups—Max wasn't clear on that point. He'd know more after the bill passed and The Voice allowed its merits to be explained to the people.

He certainly hoped it passed. His son Bobby would be registering for tele-school soon, and on that same day The Voice surgical staff would place the ear-insert in Bobby's public ear and issue him his work number. It wasn't too bad for a child, Max repeated for the hundredth time. Not as painful as it had been when he'd undergone surgery (and used both days of his annual sick-leave to recover).

For the hundredth time he wondered whether the inescapable rumors were true—that workers above the Five-level had removable inserts and could enjoy occasional aural privacy. Possibly. If he ever met a Five-level, that's the first thing he'd ask.

The 6:10 hissed to a stop at the platform and its doors split open with a pneumatic gasp. The line moved forward uncertainly for a few feet as it divided into five short lines leading to the open doors. Suddenly a man



near the front broke free and ran shouting back toward the subwalk.

Instinctively Max dropped to his knees with the others before the high frequency whine pierced his eardrum. The running man stumbled and fell at the pain they all felt, and from nowhere two guards moved to jerk him erect and drag him once more to his place in line.

He stood sobbing, partly from embarrassment for his cowardice, yet no one near him met his pleading gaze.

Certainly, we're all afraid, Max admitted silently. But not like that. Thank God we're more civilized than that.

No commuter enjoyed this part of his daily routine. Yet few actually let their fear master them. They muttered the cliché about gas and taxes, then shuffled into the tube cars. The odds against choosing one of the eliminator cars were comforting. With a train every five minutes, five cars to a train, all in all a good gamble. "Remember the odds," read signs posted every few feet overhead. Many thousands to one, the newspapers all said.

Another car-tout tugged at Max's sleeve, but he shook him off brusquely. The man ahead in line bought one of the black-bordered pages and began to read it avidly. Max peered over his shoulder and scanned the lists, searching for the Washington-Philadelphia schedule. There it was: Monday, first car on the 5:15, the third at 5:25, and the fifth at 7:20. Tuesday, third car at 6:10, second at 6:55, second at 7:00, fourth at 7:15. Wednesday, fourth at 5:25. *Why was that? Why only one car eliminated Wednesday? Today's Friday. Does that mean...?*

But Max shook off his mood and tried to concentrate on the soothing

music which had begun to melt in his ear. *Good. Fifty feet from the front of the line.* That's where the music always began, an attempt—someone had told him—to calm the more susceptible types who might panic at seeing how soon it would be their turn to enter the train.

Another thing—the touts never came this near the tracks. Max distrusted their predictions anyway. Some of them used astrology, others searched for mathematical patterns in the lists of recent eliminations. Yet everyone knew that The Voice selected cars entirely at random. It was foolish to try to predict which compartment was marked on any given train. The only certainty lay in the averages—in the ten years since elimination had been made law, since 1 Nov. 2003, The Voice had selected an average of three cars a night on the Washington-Philadelphia line. Three cars, two hundred workers each—six hundred people. Nowhere near as bad as the New York-Philadelphia run. There the average surpassed four cars a night. And still the population rose.

That fact wasn't common knowledge, but Max knew. He knew too well. He was several days behind in processing orders for food-servo equipment in the new apartment complex being constructed in the Allentown section of central Philadelphia. But he had heard nothing to suggest that The Voice would extend eliminations to other commuter lines (if only there were some occupation-office located in Pittsburgh that might hire someone like him, a man with a bare Ph.D. and only nine technical pamphlets published. Not a real book to his name.)

For a moment, Max wondered why

The Voice never chose a morning train. *Probably disturb people*, he thought, *seeing the darkened cars on their way to the office. Nobody'd put in a good day's work that way.* Whatever the reasons, he was happy he had wangled the transfer from New York to Washington after his promotion to Ten-Smith. He knew he had no chance to make Five-level, not with only a year to go till retirement. That eminence was for younger men, not someone nearing forty.

PLEASE KEEP MOVING.

The Voice sounded jovial, more cheerful as Max neared the loading platform. Was that a sign? Or was it intended to deceive? Again he cut short his thoughts and tried to recall the details of a story he had heard only that morning. He had to decide whether or not to tell Mary when he got home.

Probably not true, but worth investigating. A man in meat distribution claimed to have discovered a way of commuting from Philadelphia to Washington entirely by local trains. It took him five hours each way, but even with a full six-hour day sandwiched in, he had plenty of time at home. And local cars were exempt from elimination, at least until The Voice could have them equipped with gas nozzles. But that would take years. Till then, the equipment on the local lines was reasonably safe.

Certainly no one would ride the locals if elimination began there as well. After the cine houses installed laughing gas equipment in a futile effort to match the seductive powers of the TV laugh track, business dropped off. Who could enjoy the cine knowing that, at any time, The Voice might take

to eliminating theater crowds? Wasn't the equipment already in place? And the introduction of nozzles in local trains would signal their end too, Max was certain.

He recalled having taken locals to Chicago—a three day ride—when he put his mother in the Midwest Home. He hated the trip, but—born in the Midwest—she qualified for Senior Security nowhere else. And he certainly couldn't support her, not as a Seventeen-Smith, which he had been at the time.

The locals were terrible, stopping every few miles all the way along their route. And frighteningly empty at night, some cars carrying no more than thirty or forty people. He had slept badly, never certain when someone might ask why he hadn't taken the tube. He could have blamed it on his mother's fears, but frankly, he felt the same way. That had been before he knew the odds. And before he knew that only Fifteen-level workers and above were subject to elimination.

LOAD THE SIX-FIFTEEN,
PLEASE. THANK YOU AND
GOODNIGHT.

Max shuffled forward quickly, trying to estimate whether this train would have room for him. It would be close. And if he missed this one, he might miss dinner. Forty-seven minutes on the train, nine minutes on the subwalk—add that to 6:15. It would be close. The Servo always dished out dinner at 7:15. Once Mary had tried to warm it over, but it didn't taste the same. Not that Max could complain. A man making his way up in the Servo staff was better off not knocking his own department's efficiency. The Servo would be on time; that he knew.

Whether Max would be was another matter. People might be late; machines never were.

The line neared the train compartment door, and the man ahead of Max leaned back to say "If there's room for one, you take it."

"Shhhh!"

"There's nothing wrong. I just feel like waiting."

Damn hunch player, Max thought. Or has he seen a pattern on the tout sheet? Nonsense!

"Board, please," the guard urged them into the car.

Immediately Max recognized his error. What had he been thinking of? The wrong line! He was in the Talking Car. He hadn't made this mistake in months.

All around him the roar of voices rumbled off the car walls. Mostly the young unmarrieds who used the Talking Cars for Talk-dates, these were precisely the commuters Max detested most. Half of them would leave their straps at any excuse, walking up and down the length of the car to shout at one another. (He also admitted to jealousy—some of them looked so young to be above Fifteen-level, but they certainly must be: none of the worker classes would voluntarily ride the eliminator cars when they could sit back comfortably and wait while the ranks atop the social pyramid thinned to their benefit. But mostly, Max hated the noise.)

Even in the row of seats, limited to cripples with seat-permits, the talking was incessant. *Couldn't a man . . . ?*

DOOR CLOSING.

Max grinned at the sudden silence as everyone in the car reacted simultaneously. He snatched the overhead

strap in both hands and hung on while the tube built to topspeed. In a way it was attractive, the swaying movement as everyone clutched at his strap and tried to lean forward to minimize acceleration, then drifted upright and back in unison till they all leaned toward the rear of the car.

Counting to himself, Max estimated three minutes precisely and reversed the tension in his legs for the halt of acceleration. As slowly as they had drifted back, everyone swung upright again, and the babble started at once.

"I don't want you to think I was afraid back there or anything." A man tapped Max on the shoulder.

"What?"

"About giving you my place, I mean. It wasn't that at all. I just thought I'd wait for the next train."

Max nodded without meaning to agree. The man was clearly terrified; he hung onto his strap with both hands clenched knuckle-white, even though the train rode smoothly on its cushion of air and gave the impression of being stationary.

"No. I won't lie to you," the man continued. "But I heard today they're going to double up on Friday's trains. Maybe take a whole bunch of them at once."

Max turned away.

"Listen! I mean it! I'm in Census and. . . ."

"Why not talk it over with someone else? I'm not interested."

"'Not interested'? Gas! Tell it to The Voice, Commuter."

"Hey! Did you hear?" a woman behind them interrupted. "They gassed a car on the 5:30. A man back there called his wife from the station, and she told him. Pass it on."

The frightened man whined. "See. What did I say? They're making Fridays a big day from now on."

Trying to calm him, Max said, "You could look at it another way. Since they eliminated one car already, that makes us even safer. Ever think of that?"

"Say! Why not?" The man brightened noticeably. "You got a point. I mean, they're not going to take another one right away, are they?"

Max debated reminding him of what they both had seen on the tout-sheet—cars eliminated on consecutive trains—but thought better of it. Before he could say another word, the man dashed toward the front of the car with the good news. And Max grabbed the ear-plug hawker who passed by. Four dollars was outrageous—he could buy them in any drugstore for less than three—but it was worth it. He inserted the plugs and drew himself inside his aural privacy.

"Privacy." Almost the forgotten commodity. In a country of four hundred fifty million people, where the east coast megalopolis stretched as one great swath of pavement from Boston to Richmond, few people could afford that luxury. That accounted for the cooperatives which hired lobbyists to keep Congress apprised of the great need. Invasion of privacy had become a crime second only to unlicensed murder in severity of punishment. Now that China and the USSR had made of each other vast radio-active deserts, there was less and less emigration room on the face of the globe. While millions starved abroad, while medical science continually extended a man's potential life-span through research, while the population swelled at such enormous speed, the lobbyists had finally accom-

plished their aim and solved the problem—temporarily—in the only possible way. The eliminator cars. A simple lottery of death.

Max stared at the gas nozzles which dotted the roof of the car. Most of them would never hiss out their fog. But some would. Some spewed death through cars exactly like this one every afternoon of the week. Even the weekend excursion trains had been selected in recent weeks, though less often than commuter cars. The commuter cars carried the manager class, heads of families.

And when they died, their families went to the Kansas barracks. "The heartland of America," it had once been called. No one relished the idea of families split up that way, but the alternative to the eliminator cars was mass sterilization, much less humane, everyone agreed.

Eliminating the breadwinners offered another plus: more job openings. More men able to make their way in the government, able to vote, own property, able to take part in the lottery itself. It was a reasonable system, Max reminded himself—as he did daily.

As every commuter did.

Daily.

He found himself staring, unseeing, at the gas nozzles when the car lights dimmed and interrupted his reverie. He felt rather than heard the silence which settled over the Talking Car, and he jerked loose his ear plugs. Every other commuter stood frozen, holding his breath. The lights brightened, then dimmed again. A woman screamed and that signaled permission for a great roar of protests, of mumbled prayers and anguished lament. And then the lights came up to stay.

But the rest of the trip was different, as each commuter stared warily at his neighbor and at the nozzles which seemed suddenly to hang lower over their heads. Max vowed he would mention the local trains to his wife. If one man could endure the long trip each day, so could others. He would locate that man in meat distribution and ask him the way.

He might even resign. He could do that, and take Mary and Bobby to the Kansas barracks. Why not? A year till retirement, and then what? Wasn't retirement nearly the same as the dole? If he stuck out the full year, they could keep their apartment, and perhaps have enough money for an occasional trip—on the train, of course. But was it worth another year of the lottery? It would be different if they could afford their own car. Then he might see an advantage in hanging on. But the annual 100% owner's tax on automobiles put them out of reach of everyone but Senators and One-level workers.

He could at least mention it to her. He had been in the lottery nearly since the beginning, ten years of hearing The Voice, of dreading the tube. Once he had come to work to discover that Twelve-Parsons at the next desk had been eliminated. It was difficult to ignore the absence of someone he knew personally.

It simply wasn't worth it, he told himself as he stared at the nozzles.

Preoccupied, he missed seeing the sign light up and came to his senses only at The Voice.

DECELERATION IN TEN SECONDS.

He snatched quickly at the strap

overhead and tensed his legs against inertia.

THIRTY SECONDS TO DISEMBARK. PREPARE PLEASE.

The doors gasped open amid a babble of relief as people exchanged goodbys before reaching the platform and enforced silence. Max drifted behind them, waiting for The Voice to quiet them before he risked stepping out into the mob. Yet this time they quieted strangely. The silence was self-imposed, tangible in a way that troubled him.

When he stepped from the car he saw the reason. To his left, the car ahead of his was dark. Totally, completely dark, its doors still sealed as it sat in the station. Then the guards arrived to uncouple the darkened car and shunt it off the track to whatever destination awaited selected cars.

Two hundred people! Only one car away. If I had. . .

"Close one, hey buddy?" the frightened commuter whispered with a grin. "What's that do to the odds?"

Max returned the smile in spite of himself. The man was right. *A near-miss like that's probably as close as I'll ever get.* He winked at his companion.

On the subwalk home through the crowded tunnel under the Philadelphia apartment complex, he felt the sudden urge to look outside, to see what the weather was like. But that could wait till he got home. He and Mary would put Bobby to bed after dinner and set the autonurse, then walk over to the window. One advantage of having Ten-rank, he merited an apartment near the outer wall of the complex. The nearest window was only five minutes away, yet they hadn't taken the walk in months.

(Continued on page 102)

COMMUTER SPECIAL

17

THE HEYWORTH FRAGMENT

Richard Lupoff has contributed a number of "Ova-Hamlet" stories to FANTASTIC, but this marks his debut to these pages. The story which follows is unique in that it has no plot, hardly any cast of characters, and offers a conclusion that remains tantalizingly just beyond our grasp. Perhaps for those very reasons, it is one of the most haunting stories I have ever read . . .

RICHARD A. LUPOFF

Illustrated by MIKE KALUTA

1. DISCOVERY OF THE ITEM. The portion of material known as "the Heyworth Fragment" first came to the attention of the auditorium projectionist during one of the regular Sunday evening film showings in the fall semester. The announced program for the evening was Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel's classic "The Andalusian Dog" and the little known but critically well-regarded "Rudolf Hess at Spandau."

The projectionist was a graduate student, Tuck Heyworth, not at all given to practical jokes. In fact, Heyworth's serious outlook and total lack of humor were well known on the campus. At the time he disclaimed all knowledge of the origin of the fragment which has come to bear his name, and to this day swears total ignorance of the matter.

He submitted voluntarily to polygraph examination once the affair began to suggest serious implications,

and all indications were that his ignorance was quite as abysmal as he alleged it to be.

According to Heyworth's statement, "The Andalusian Dog" was nearly over, he was about to thread up the first reel of "Rudolf Hess at Spandau," when he discovered an additional reel of film on top of the feature film. It bore no label, but was wound on a standard 16 millimeter Goldsmith reel.

Assuming the film to be a short cartoon or other suitable addition to the program, Heyworth attempted to thread it on the second projector so it would be ready for screening at the end of "The Andalusian Dog." He was surprised that the film started without leaders or titles, but later explained that this did not arouse his curiosity greatly as he assumed that the film was one produced by students, and that the technique of starting *in medias res* was used deliberately by the student filmmaker.

Heyworth was unable to thread the film, however, and after making several futile attempts to do so set it aside as a defective print and proceeded to thread and show "Rudolf Hess at Spandau" as had been the original intent of the program committee.

When the showing of "Rudolf Hess at Spandau" was completed, Heyworth rewound the films and returned them to the distributor. However, as there was neither receipt nor shipping case for the unexpected reel, it was left behind in the projection booth. It was only some days later that Heyworth recalled the odd print, and attempted once more to thread it, purely for his own satisfaction.

He was again unable to do so, and upon examination of the print discovered that it was of nonstandard format. At this point Heyworth contacted the university's film department, and turned the print over to the department for their disposition. He showed no interest in the content of the film at this or any later time, contending when questioned later that only his inability to thread the film roused his curiosity and that only the technical aspects of the film's unusual format intrigued him.

Heyworth has since received his master's degree and resides in the area, working as a night supervisor in his father-in-law's ladies' purse factory. He has proven cooperative with regard to questioning concerning the fragment, but has been unable to provide any information further than that already reported.

2. IRREGULAR FORMAT OF THE FRAGMENT. Once delivered to the film

THE HEYWORTH FRAGMENT



department, the fragment was inspected for format. Almost immediately it became apparent why it had proved impossible to thread it in a standard projector, although the differences in format were sufficiently slight as to have baffled Tuck, who was not a film technician but only a cursorily-trained projectionist who was limited to naked-eye examination of the film and in a dimly-lighted projection booth at that.

Although the film was wound on a standard 16 millimeter reel, and to the naked eye appeared to be of standard width, it was actually just over 17 millimeters wide. The precise width does not work out into exact units, fractions, or decimals in either the metric or English system, or in any other against which it was compared. This may be a significant datum, but there is no assurance that the width was set on some more obscure scale, or that it is not merely arbitrary.

The frame format is square rather than being in the three-by-four horizontal format to which standard the industry adheres, but again there have been many variant formats developed, ranging from the successful wide-screen productions of recent years to round, upright, and other shapes, including square frames.

Presumably because of the square frames, the sprocket holes, which are themselves square and slightly larger than normal, and which appear in an alternating pattern on either side of the print, are not spaced at the normal interval of three-tenths of an inch, (or six-tenths, as would be the case with the alternating arrangement of the Heyworth Fragment), but are approximately 20 millimeters apart.

The frames themselves occur at a frequency of just under 32 per foot. Once again, it will be noted that none of the dimensions of the print are commensurate with either English or metric measurements. All attempts to bring the measurements of the Heyworth Fragment into coincidence with inches or millimeters have failed.

It should be noted further that the "film" itself, or what is usually referred to as a film, was not one at all, strictly speaking. While the fragment appeared to the naked eye to be a standard celluloid-based motion picture print, later analysis proved it to be of an unusual organic-metallic compound. This compound, reproduced after some rather difficult laboratory procedures had been mastered, has been found to be a superior replacement for standard photographic emulsions, serving, in slightly different forms, as both original and print stock, with outstanding color fidelity and an unusual range of light sensitivities.

In the case of the Heyworth Fragment, however, once the format of the print was adequately ascertained, the question arose as to whether it would be more practical to convert a standard projector for the showing of the film, or to attempt to convert the film for showing on a standard projector. A third course of action, to dismiss the entire affair as a joke by students, with or without the collusion of Tuck Heyworth, was given consideration only until naked-eye examination of the film proved so intriguing that a proper screening of the film was definitely decided upon.

After some discussion, the chairman of the film department, Dr. Cashman, placed himself firmly on the side of

converting the fragment. His argument, which came to be accepted throughout the department, was that once converted, the fragment could be duplicated and shown on any standard projector, but that if the projector rather than the film were modified, access to the single modified projector would be required for any study of the film. Further, the making of duplicate prints would be extremely difficult and tedious work because of problems entailed in working with the non-standard footage.

The fragment was painstakingly matted onto 35 millimeter stock and duplicated through the use of an optical printer. Once a duplicate master in 35 millimeter format had been made it was of course no problem to strike as many 35 millimeter prints as desired. When projected with standard equipment these prints showed a full, square "Heyworth" frame, matted on black. The color of the original print was reproduced with excellent fidelity.

Two additional problems were encountered in converting the print.

One of these was the sound track. Because of the organic-metallic stock used in the fragment, no visible optical or magnetic track was noted at first, and it was assumed that the fragment was silent. However, upon screening of the converted version, it became obvious that sound was required to make sense of the content of the film. The original was re-examined, this time more closely than ever, and there was found, embedded in the edge of the film, very much as a sound track is placed in normal prints, an alloy wire of extreme fineness.

Every attempt was made to read this wire as a sound-track, and after ex-

tremely lengthy efforts, Dr. Bloch-Erich of the department of computer sciences claimed to have decoded the wire's content. It was, he asserted, digitally recorded information, but not basically digital data. Rather, Bloch-Erich claimed, a continuous flow of analog data—possibly sound, possibly odor or other messages—had been recorded *in digital form* on the wire.

By converting the digital data from the imbedded wire to standard nine-track 2420 format and reading the tape into the university's Model 195 data processing system, Bloch-Erich stated that he could have the computer decode the information, transmit it to a modified 7774 audio output device, and convert it back to standard audio tape form. This in turn led to a further pair of problems.

One of these, Bloch-Erich complained, was that after his computer program had decoded, edited, and transmitted the audio content of the Heyworth wire, there remained a kind of data-detritus which Bloch-Erich was unable to explain. He guessed that the Heyworth film was intended originally for some sort of projector or other reader which could detect not merely pictorial and audio recordings, but others as well, and that the surplus code that remained after the audio data was filtered out contained messages intended to be perceived other than visually and aurally.

The second problem encountered by Dr. Bloch-Erich was that the sound track produced by his equipment, while sounding accurately with the image in the fragment, made no apparent sense. This intriguing aspect of the fragment will be alluded to again. For the moment it should be noted that Dr.

Bloch-Erich and his machines are attempting, thus far without notable success, to find some meaning in the (presumed) words.

The final technical problem to be dealt with was the frame-rate at which the film should be projected. As the fragment itself was found in a format approximating, although clearly not identical with, 16 millimeter, it was first assumed that the film was meant to be projected at 24 frames per second. The first converted 35 millimeter print was projected at this speed, but immediate discrepancies were noted in the movement of the actors, mechanical objects, and other objects in the film.

The more this problem was considered, the more baffling it became. Movements of hands, feet, or mouths could be observed, but to establish the proper speed was not simple. A man walking at a normal brisk pace will usually approximate the military march of 90 paces per minute, or two-thirds of a second per pace. But how could it be determined that a person in the film was in fact moving at that pace—perhaps he was meandering at half that speed, or pacing rapidly at a far greater rate.

The sound track, once Dr. Bloch-Erich had decoded it, seemed at first to offer assistance, but again, unless the voice characteristics of the actor were known, the proper speed for the tape could not be determined either. Did a particular figure speak in a basso profundo—or a piercing falsetto? If this were known, the projection speed could be determined, or vice versa. But without one item of information to start from, the other must remain equally a puzzle.

At length a tentative solution was

reached when a scene was found in which water was poured. Giving this the normal 32 feet per second squared rate of acceleration placed the rest of the film into something that appeared fairly normal speed, and gave the voices a level not unacceptable to the ear as normal.

There remained in several scenes apparent anomalies in the behaviour of light, but these had to be accepted as “given” rather than adjusted for, as any further adjustments to the frame rate to allow for these items would have thrown all the rest of the contents of the fragment into a state of utter confusion.

3. CONTENT OF THE FILM—SCENES.

The fragment contains only five scenes, each running for approximately the same length. The intended projection time of the scenes is not known with assurance, as this depends obviously upon the intended projection rate, itself not fully ascertained. However, by the gravity-test previously mentioned, the established frame rate indicates an overall running time of somewhat longer than two minutes, or approximately 25 seconds per scene.

It should be emphasized, however, that this is not firmly established. It has been suggested, for instance, that the fluid being poured is not water at all, but a clear substance of highly viscous consistency, which would pour far more slowly than water due to its own gooey nature. This suggestion is not taken very seriously, but in the face of so little data it cannot be wholly disregarded.

An even farther fetched suggestion is that the filming was done on location in a setting where acceleration due to

gravity is not equal to the familiar 32 feet per second squared. The individual responsible for this suggestion will remain unnamed as he himself regards the idea as ludicrous; nonetheless, it is a possibility not to be excluded from consideration.

The contents of the scenes themselves are as follows:

First, a room. Camera work in this scene, as in all, is technically proficient but static and unimaginative. The cameraman seems to have set up his equipment, obtained correct lighting and focus, and made his shot in a single take, entirely without camera or lens movement of any sort. Characters move in and out of the frame, block one another from view, appear off-center or even partially out of the frame, entirely without regard from the cameraman or director.

The room itself is bare, sparsely furnished, with apparent plaster walls in a nondescript pastel shade slowly crumbling away. A general air of oppressiveness and decay seems to pervade the scene. Visible furniture consists only of a chair, or presumed chair, and another object of uncertain purpose.

The presumed chair is so identified because one person is seated upon it throughout the scene; the piece of furniture itself is almost entirely blocked from view. The second article of furniture is made of a glossy material colored a dark orange; it stands upright beside the seated person, who at no time touches it although in several frames the seated person seems to glance surreptitiously at the orange object.

Neither ceiling nor floor is visible in the scene. The edge of something presumed to be either a window or a

picture frame is seen, but only the edge.

While the seated person is visible a second individual appears, back to the camera. Voices are heard; it is assumed that they are the voices of these two. One seems from its inflection to be angry, belligerent, demanding. The other varies between defiance and submission, attempting alternately to provoke and/or frustrate the first, or to placate and obtain respite from the first.

Late in this scene, while the camera remains steady and the image clear, the persons become involved in a tussle of some sort. A third person appears, clearly a woman, dressed in clothing of unconventional style. She faces the seated person, raises an object toward her own face. The seated person is heard to cry out in horror and despair. The woman turns toward the camera and it is seen that she is eating a goblet of uncooked flesh, its specific nature being unknown. The woman weeps.

Second, an exterior landscape. The ground can be seen for some distance from the camera. It is covered with low vegetation, apparently low shrubs, some grasses and other small plants. Representatives of the botany department have been unable to identify the growth, but they have given assurances that there is nothing extraordinary about the flora.

In the distance can be seen a roadway and beyond it woods. Again, the composition of the woods is unascertained. The roadway is apparently of hard surface, light in color. Movement can be seen upon the roadway, but frustratingly it is at such a distance that it is impossible to determine the nature of the vehicles in use. Extreme magnification of the film does not provide

sufficient resolution to identify the vehicles other than to establish them as being drawn rather than powered. The animals pulling them cannot be clearly seen, and debate has developed as to whether they are four-legged beasts drawing in tandem or even troika fashion, or (absurdly perhaps) previously unidentified creatures possessing more than four legs.

At one point it was even suggested that the creatures were not animals at all, but human beings tethered and forced to draw wagons of passengers and freight.

Third, a corridor. The relationship between this scene and the first, that of the room, is unknown. It is hypothesized that the corridor is located in the same building as the room, perhaps even that the room opens off the corridor. There is no evidence to support this idea.

The walls, floor and ceiling of the corridor are apparently of identical construction. No seams are visible, suggesting either that they have been concealed architecturally or that the corridor is made of a single fabric, as by casting in a mold or hollowing from rock. Light is provided by a series of convoluted strips which seem to be embedded in the walls and floor. It has been suggested that the convolutions of the strips represent script of some sort, but all attempts to identify this have been unsuccessful and it has been tentatively concluded that the strips are arranged in abstract decorative patterns.

The corridor is lined at irregular intervals with what seem to be mechanical devices of roughly human conformation. These have been identified by various faculty representatives

as suits of XIVth Century Germanic armor, positronic robots, astronauts' space garb, and (in one case) cryogenic mummy cases. Each faculty representative has prepared a justification for his identification, and in all cases the argument has seemed so powerful and thoroughgoing that, in the absence of contending suggestions, any one might be readily accepted. However, in the presence of the varied hypotheses, no one has achieved general para-

mounting. Fourth, another exterior shot. Unlike the previous exterior scene, this was apparently made at night. Also, it seems to have been made from a very high angle, indicating a very high boom mounting of the camera, or its mounting atop a very tall structure of some sort, or even an aerial mounting. This last possibility is not in concert with other aspects of the film, but even if it is considered, it must be noted that the characteristic absence of camera movement, while evidence of lack of ingenuity in normal circumstances, indicates in the case of aerial cinematography the development of extremely sophisticated techniques of aviation and cinematic equipment.

The camera is directed toward the horizon. There appears—again, most frustratingly, in the extreme distance—what seems to be a city. Tall structures rear skyward; they are dotted with lights of great brilliance and variety of color, which wink on and off in apparently non-random fashion. Attempts to decode the pattern thus displayed have led to the tentative conclusion that esthetic considerations alone cannot account for the blinking, although it is noted that the esthetic effect is also highly pleasing, and a

number of undergraduates who had access to the converted film compared it favorably to the so-called "light shows" that are sometimes utilized in conjunction with their electronic concerts.

A small portion of the night sky is visible beyond the city. Unfortunately the brilliance of the city's lights obliterates the stars which might otherwise be visible. Brilliant objects can nonetheless be seen in the sky, moving toward the city. Because these objects are visible only as points of variously colored light, it is not possible to determine their size, distance from the camera, or velocity of movement. As has been pointed out through a simile to the uncertainty principle as applied to the position and velocity of electrons, if one factor is known the other is calculable, but with neither datum available as a tool, the other cannot be deduced.

In the available frames, most of the moving lights do not reach the city. A few, however, do reach the structures, following which the buildings seem to begin a process of distortion and a tendency to become transparent, as if they were being somehow disintegrated as a result of the impact of the glowing lights.

It has been hypothesized that the inhabitants of the city may be one element in a conflict of unspecified nature, while the glowing lights represent a weapon of some sort. If this hypothesis is accepted, it may be further suggested that the blinking of the city's lights may indeed be an attempt to communicate, possibly with the originally intended recipients of the film. Carrying the same supposition further, the glowing lights may be in-

terpreted as the visible evidence of an attempt to bombard the city, possibly for the very purpose of preventing this communication, although other destructive designs may as well be contemplated against the city and its inhabitants.

While facile, the foregoing hypothesis seems not to contemplate the rather obvious question of the deployment of a clearly large and presumably expensive force, against an entire city, when a far smaller effort might have been directed against the camera in order to achieve the same end, i.e., the prevention of communication from the city.

Fifth, a closeup. The subject is the person seen seated in the first scene of the fragment. Because of the subject's unfamiliarly styled clothing it is impossible to determine his (?) sex. The subject faces directly into the camera. His face is covered with bruises and there are traces of wiped-away blood. One eye is puffed badly and the hair is dishevelled.

The subject speaks to the camera imploringly, his voice is heard on the sound track. No words are understood, of course, but the tone leads one to believe that the subject has been beaten, perhaps tortured, and is pleading with the viewer for assistance or rescue.

After some time a hand or hand-like object enters the frame line and moves rapidly toward the camera. Before the hand or object reaches the lens (or goes out of focus—the technical quality of these scenes is remarkable!) the fragment ends.

It appears fairly obvious that the five scenes comprising the Heyworth Fragment are not a complete film. What

other material should have preceded and followed the five scenes is wholly conjectural.

4. REMAINING QUESTIONS. Because the fragment is so short and obviously incomplete it has raised many more questions than can presently be resolved. In particular the locale of the footage is puzzling. The race of the characters—the person being interrogated, the interrogator, a woman seen weeping while devouring a raw joint of meat (?) in the first interrogation scene—is unknown.

Variations in skin tone and facial configuration between the interrogator and the interrogatee may be merely individual characteristics, or may be indicative of different racial stock. If so, which races are represented? In no case is skin color or configuration so unusual as to suggest that the persons are not Earth-humans, and yet they do not fit comfortably into any known line of human stock.

Similarly, the language spoken has never been identified. It sometimes sounds maddeningly familiar, yet no linguist—and the film has been screened repeatedly for the full language department—has made positive identification. Further, the speech of the interrogator is not identical to that of the interrogatee. Individual variation? Regional dialects? A “foreign” accent on the part of one of them? If so, *which* one?

To return to the second scene, what or who pull the wagons?

In the third scene, what are the figures lining the corridor?

In the fourth scene, what is the message of the lights, and what are the aerial objects moving toward the city?

If, has been hypothesized, the message of the city's lights is a plea for aid while the aerial objects are weapons being used to bombard the city, then when and where does the conflict occur? Are the residents of the city innocent victims of threatened annihilation—or are they the perpetrators of aggression which is being hurled back upon them?

In the final scene, what is the appeal of the interrogatee? Who was the cameraman and why did the interrogatee think it worthwhile to address his appeal to the camera? Was it an act of desperation, or did he really believe that the film would be seen by someone able to come to his aid? Was the glossy orange object involved in this hope?

In any case, why and how did the cameraman get away with his film? And, emphatically not to be forgotten among the many enigmas of the fragment, how did the film find its way into Tuck Heyworth's projection booth?

Underlying all of the outstanding questions is that of the source of the fragment. As with so many intriguing aspects of the matter, the interested members of the university community have provided not too few but too many hypotheses. Among these—all of them seemingly unlikely but none impossible—are the following:

That the film originated on another planet whose inhabitants bear an uncanny resemblance to ourselves, either through parallel evolution or through colonization at some remote and forgotten time.

That the film originated, or *will* originate, on our own planet, in a future era marked by the apparent brutality of the interrogation and the pos-

sible degradation of humankind to the level of dray animals.

That the film was made in an alternate "present" upon a version of the earth purely hypothetical to us, but to whose inhabitants it is entirely real while we exist only in imagination.

That the film is a hoax; this, despite the obviously vast effort that would have been required for its production, and its use of state-of-the-art advances in film technology if not technique.

Et c.

Assuming that the film is indeed authentic, one must unavoidably view its content as an urgent appeal for help. Precisely what is happening to the inhabitants of the world portrayed is unascertained, but all evidence indicates that it is something horrible, involving not merely death to many and physical hardship for the survivors, but a tyranny and degradation matching the most appalling known to history. Without question, the dispatch of assistance to the victims is a matter of the highest urgency.

What, then, is the source of the fragment? Developing technology for space exploration fails to suggest any potential interplanetary origin of the film. Archaeology similarly fails to sustain any suggestion that the fragment had its origin in some earlier civilization on our own planet, however appealing to the romantic in us as may be the

prospect of an artifact from an otherwise wholly lost civilization of such obvious high attainments.

The remaining possible source, then, is the previously dismissed suggestion the fragment "will" originate in a future period on the earth. If this is accepted, there remains the great conundrum of how the fragment could possibly have been transported backward through time into our own era. Contemplation of this question leads one through the realm of physics and a series of apparent mathematical paradoxes, and on into the kingdom of the metaphysicians.

In any case, it should provide comfort to any persons who find these puzzles and, indeed, the entire affair puzzling, to note that both the original Heyworth fragment and the subsequent copies, including Dr. Bloch-Erich's tapes, have been delivered to the appropriate Federal agency. Further work in the decipherment of the sound wire in particular will take place under strict government security restrictions, as will further research concerning the film itself.

All concerned may rest assured that the final disposition of the Heyworth fragment will be handled with the full wisdom and responsibility of our democratically chosen leaders.

—RICHARD A. LUPOFF

(Continued from page 10)

1968...? It didn't matter, now. I stopped halfway to the apartment and went back, thumbing the light on again while I relieved the two dead cops of their weapons. Perhaps Marcia and I were safe . . . for a little while. . . .

But we citizens didn't have much to fight with. We would need all the help we could get. I hoped the Guardsmen and the Soldiers would be on our side, when they came.

—TED WHITE

THE WRONG END OF TIME

JOHN BRUNNER

Illustrated by DAVID COOK

The Russian spy's task was far from simple: somehow he had to find someone whose thinking was unique in a United States gone mad. The problem was: would the Security Forces find him first? And if they did, what then would happen to the contra-terrene aliens out beyond Pluto—?

(second of Two Parts)

SYNOPSIS

Out beyond Pluto the Russian space-probe was met by aliens. Intelligent beyond human conception and ~~constratere~~ in nature, they would make a deadly enemy if they so chose. Communication was strictly one-sided: the aliens created a gas cloud in space and excited it to radiate a series of still pictures. These pictures proved their knowledge of humanity to be extensive. The final picture showed a dirty, misshapen, but recognizable man, wrapped in a raw animal-hide, waving a stone axe. The message seemed explicit: they could drive humanity back to the stone age.

The need to communicate was pressing; no one knew the extent of the aliens' patience. And communication had as yet been futile.

Vassily Sheklov was tapped to make the dangerous mission into the United States in search of—what? A new way of thinking? He wasn't certain. It was a long-shot, a wild gamble. But another alien picture had shown a tell-tale thermonuclear cloud over the United States,

and everyone knew the Americans were crazed with neurotic insecurity. Closed off from the rest of the world, Fortress America not only feared war but had the most extensive armory for war in the history of the world. Let the aliens lob down one c-t missile and the world would be plunged into war as the Americans retaliated in every direction. The answer had to be found, and America was where it most likely lay.

Sheklov was landed by submarine off the coast, near a defense installation. The Russian reasoning had been that such an area would be less perfectly guarded than others, the Americans placing all their confidence upon the perfection of their installations.

Sheklov was met by Turpin. Injected into the United States a quarter century earlier, the man who had once answered to the name of Yashvili was now Lewis Raymond Turpin, senior vice-president of Energetics General. His corporation was the country's leading defense contractor, responsible for nearly all the systems that made up the elaborate defensive network which guarded Fortress

America. Turpin, in turn, was the man who had leaked each and every new development to the Russians. He never sabotaged the systems; he simply reported on them. Those who knew about him (a very few) regarded him as the man who had forestalled World War Three.

It was Turpin's duty now to provide Sheklov with a cover identity, to transform him into Donald Holtzer, Canadian timber-salesman, giving him a safe means of exploring the country. The task made Turpin less than happy: it jeopardized his cover for the first time in decades and left him uncertain of his own status. Was Sheklov really here to spy on him? Were the Russians worried about his assimilation? He had lived here a long time now; he thought of the Americans as "we" and the Russians as "they."

For Sheklov the long drive to Lakonia, where Turpin lived, was revealing. The United States was a study in contrasts, an example of what national paranoia could do in only a few score years. Rich—and yet poor. Its citizens zealously policed, its masses bled by their country to support its mania for defense.

Sheklov's arrival in the country was less secret than he had supposed. His landing had been watched by Danty, a thin boy of mixed parentage, a "black" in a white society abandoned by most of the nation's blacks years earlier.

Danty had turned off the defensive site's security devices upon entering, had watched Sheklov come ashore, be met by Turpin, and leave. Then he too had left, puzzled by what he had seen, but aware that his own role in what was yet to come would be an important one.

He left the site shut down when he left.



He was able to hitch a ride back to Cowville, across the man-made lake from Lakonia, by the simple expedient of desiring a ride.

Cowville was the dark side of Lakonia, a vast slum in which the majority of the people lived; Lakonia was for the rich and the very rich. Danty lived in a small apartment on the top floor of an old building under the hovercar line, behind a door on which was lettered *CONSULTATIONS*. He shared the apartment with Magda, a middle-aged woman who gave advice to the troubled.

Victim to his hunches, he set out the next day to find a girl menaced by three homosexual terrorists, Shark, Potato-head and Josh. Rescuing her, he discovered her to be Lora Turpin, daughter of the man who had met the Russian. She invited him to a party her father was throwing—largely, he thought, as an act of defiance towards her parents.

Meantime, Magda had been consulted by a woman named Fenella Clarke, who made an appointment for the following Monday.

At the party Sheklov finds himself being photographed with the Prexy—the present presidential figurehead, this one acting on the behalf of the Navy—and meeting the other members of Turpin's family. They include, besides Lora, her brother Peter (who is homosexual), her mother, an alcoholic, and Turpin's mother-in-law, Mrs. Gleewood. He also meets the Reverend Powell, the nation's leading religious figure, who divides his time between making passes at Lora and at Peter. Most important, he meets Danty and is struck by him. For Danty leads him into an unguarded admission—his own knowledge of Indian religious teachings. His cover is blown—if Danty realizes it.

The next day things take a turn for the worse: Turpin receives a call from his security maintenance crew:

"That reserved area where you came ashore—they sent a service crew there today. Know what they found? They found it had been turned off in the small hours of the morning you arrived. Turned off! Do you understand what that means?"

Sheklov did. But he waited for Turpin to put it into words.

"If means someone else knows you're here," Turpin spat. "And you've put both our necks in a noose!"

XIV

AROUND THE SHOULDER of the world, Bratcheslavsky had once said without warning, in the middle of a training session, "Vassily Sheklov!"

To which he had reacted with a surprised cock of his eyebrows.

"Know why you've been picked for this assignment?"

"Well!" Selecting the least arrogant-seeming of a dozen possible answers in the space of less than a heartbeat, and moreover not wanting to appear to cast doubt on the competence of those who had singled him out by adopting a pose of exaggerated modesty: "Well, because out of the range available, I guess I must be the most suitable . . . comrade."

"Your diplomatic turns of phrase do you credit," Bratcheslavsky chuckled, stubbing the latest of the aromatic cigarettes which were certain to kill him before his time. "But I'm not here to have my perspicacity flattered, regardless of what you may safely put over on other people. I guess it hasn't escaped your notice that one of the luxu-

ries America permits itself is an exceptional degree of subtlety in the shades of meaning conveyed by the English language?"

At which: a nod.

"Well, then! During your long struggle with the various idioms of modern English, you can hardly have failed to run across the image of someone 'thinking fast on his feet'—hm?"

"Of course, comrade. A metaphor drawn from boxing, I believe. A term of praise for someone who—"

"Boxing be buggered," Bratcheslavsky retorted. They were speaking English, of course; the entire briefing was conducted in it, the ideal being to drive Russian so far to the fringes of Sheklov's consciousness that he would not be recognized as a Russian by those who might survey him after his injection into the States. "The idiom is used by people who hate boxing, who wouldn't pay ten cents to get into a boxing-match, who would call up and complain if a TV company wasted programme-time on an international championship! No, the image is detached from its origins. And what I want to know is this: do you recognize its applicability to this mission?"

"You mean it was a quality which was taken into consideration when they picked me for it."

"The quality, Vassily. The most important of all. Were it not for your possession of this talent, we might well have given up all hope of injecting another agent as blatantly as we shall have to in your case. Human beings have this peculiar limitation on their thinking, you know: they tend to put up with enormous risks simply because they can't exhaustively analyse the nature of the actions they realise they

ought to take to insure themselves. As thinkers, Vassily, we are an amazingly lazy species. It's a wonder we survive from one day to the next. Yes! Let's get on with it!"

All of which sprang back instantly into Sheklov's mind, vivid as a three-dée movie picture.

He said coldly to Turpin, still looming over him as though about to tear him limb from limb, "Shut up and sit down."

"You—!"

"I said shut up!" With an excess of unfeigned anger. "I wish you'd use your wits now and then! You just said someone else must have known I was coming ashore, didn't you? But you didn't take one deep breath and ask yourself who! Put your vanity away, will you?"

"What?" But his anger was turning to bluster, and Sheklov knew it.

"You heard. Stop and think for a moment. *Who* would be in a position to know that something was going to happen off-shore at a reserved area? Do you imagine you're unique?"

Slowly Turpin sank back into his chair. "I—I don't follow you."

"That's obvious." Sheklov loaded his tone with sarcasm. "I'll spell it out, then. You claim your cover has never been penetrated, right?"

"Of course! You think they'd let someone in my position ride for twenty-five years? Hell, no!"

"If that's true of you, it may be true of someone else."

"You mean someone I don't know about was instructed to make sure I did cushion your landfall? I—"

"No! To make sure the submarine wasn't shot out of the water!"

"They why was he crazy enough to leave the site shut down, knowing that next time a service crew came by security forces would flock after them like—like crows?" Turpin produced a small phial from his pocket, shook out a white tablet, and gulped it down with a swig of now-cold coffee. Sheklov seized the chance to thrust a fresh proposal home.

"Then look at it this way. Is it easy to shut down one of your sites?"

"Easy?" Turpin echoed with an incredulous laugh. "Hell, no. I could just about shut one down from memory, but I'd rather have a schematic in front of me. You have to close nine of a series of twelve switches in a special order—that's after you get through a sintered-ceramic door—and the other three are dummies wired straight into Continental Defence HQ!"

"In other words," Sheklov said, leaning forward, "whoever did this had access to confidential EG data. Suppose this had nothing to do with me. Suppose it was aimed at Energetics General. What about your rival corporations? Aren't some of them resentful of EG's exclusive contract for automatic defence systems?"

"Well . . ." The trunk Turpin had swallowed was taking effect; he was able to consider the notion calmly.

"Come to that," Sheklov pressed, "the Navy isn't too happy about the situation, I'm told."

"My God," Turpin said slowly.

"You see my point? Suppose one of EG's staff has been bribed to demonstrate that your systems are vulnerable to sabotage!" Turpin sat stock-still for long seconds. Abruptly he jumped to his feet. "It's thin! Christ, it's thin! But you're right—it could be a way to

misdirect the investigation. I'll shoot for it. But it's going to be hell anyhow. Because . . . Well, you know the only way to break EG's contract on this?"

Sheklov shook his head.

"To impeach the Board for treason. In which case I can confidently expect to be shot to death by an Army firing-squad. And I couldn't help but take you with me. They have very efficient interrogation-drugs nowadays."

He glanced at his watch, and concluded, "I must go. They said they'd have a veetol on the beach for me in ten minutes."

The moment the door closed, Sheklov's self-control failed and he began to shake. His mouth dried, his guts churned, and for a terrible few seconds he thought his bladder was going to let go. Just in time, he forced a deep breath into his lungs, held it, and was able to deploy the resources due to his yoga training: the *pranayana* first, to cancel out the panic-reactions of his body, and then a series of mental exercises to drive unrealised possibilities back to their proper status in his awareness.

But the shock had reached deep down through his personality, to layers which had already been badly bruised by his encounter with Danty, and it was a long process. It was still not complete when he realised with a start that someone else was in the room: Lora.

"I'm sorry," she muttered from the doorway. "But I heard Dad go out, and I thought maybe I could sneak in here and get away from everybody. But if you don't want to be disturbed—"

With an effort Sheklov put back his Holtzer mask, and smiled at her.

"Come in by all means. I can't—well, I guess this isn't the thing for a guest to say, but I can't blame you for wanting to hide out for a bit."

Gratefully she shut the door and came to sit in the chair her father had been using. She dropped into it like a limp doll, legs sprawled, and he realised with a shock that she was wearing nothing under her short black indoor robe. During lunch he hadn't noticed; so much of her had been hidden under the table.

Obviously, though, it hadn't occurred to her that exposing her crotch was either immodest or discourteous. He considered, very briefly, reverting to the full Holtzer pattern and commenting in shocked terms, then decided he should risk not doing so to secure an opening for some inquiries about Danty.

While he was casting around for the correct turn of phrase to lead into the subject, however, she saved him the trouble. "Don, what do you think of Danty?" she demanded suddenly.

"Ah . . ." *Careful!* "As a matter of fact, I found him quite an interesting young man. I was astonished when he claimed to be a reb, because he's not at all what you'd imagine. I got the idea he was putting people on."

"You mean like needling Reverend Powell?"

"Oh, that—yes! I've seen Powell on TV now and then, of course, but last night was the first time I'd met him. And I was not impressed." *Good; that came out in the proper tone of stuffy disapproval.*

"Exactly right for Peter," Lora muttered. "Christ, they make a lovely pair . . . Say, Don—! Oh, never mind."

"What?"

She made a vague gesture, staring disconsolately at her delicately-fingered hands. "Oh . . . Oh, I was just going to ask if you'd like to sleep with me for the rest of your stay. So I could get out of Peter's company. I think you're nice. You smile a lot, as though you mean it, and somewhere underneath there's something—well—something real about you. If you see what I mean. So I just thought . . ."

Another gesture like the former.

Startled, Sheklov said after a pause, "Well, I'm flattered—I guess. But . . . Well, your parents, for one thing . . ." The words tailed away.

Flattered isn't it. I'm flabbergasted!

"Oh, them!" Lora said. "Think they give a fart what I do? They never have. That's why I do all these crazy things. They call it 'tolerance', or 'freedom from inhibitions', or some shit like that. What it means really is, they have an excuse for not bothering about their kids . . . Still, I guess it might foul up your business deal with Dad, hm?"

"Well—uh—it might," Sheklov said. "And in any case you won't have to share with Peter much longer. I expect to leave in a day or two. And if you'll forgive my saying so, I had the impression you're involved with Danty."

"Oh, I'm such a reeky fool!" Her eyes were staring into infinity. "I got so mad this morning, over at his place. About something that doesn't matter at all. I mean, I've done much worse things to people—do them all the time. I think sometimes I'll go crazy, right out of my skull crazy. Maybe cut my throat in a fit or something!"

She sounded as though she meant it. Sheklov's spine crawled.

"Well, surely you haven't done any-

thing you can't put right by apologising," Sheklov ventured. "I certainly hope you didn't. Like I said, I found Danty kind of interesting, and I hoped I might see him again, talk some more."

"Really?" She sat up sharply and her eyes lost their glazed look.

"Why not? You know, I must admit I don't like this attitude you find down here, about young people—as though they had to be sort of quarantined. Hell, I'm not so old myself, I'm thirty-five, and back home I have friends from—"

But she wasn't listening. "You mean if I went looking for him I could—well, I could say you wanted me to, not just have to crawl to him and eat dirt?" She jumped to her feet.

"If that would help, sure you can." And Sheklov thought: *I'm going to be a long time figuring out the mores here!*

"Oh, Don!" Lora exclaimed, clasp- ing her hands. "I love you!"

She rushed forward, jumped on his lap, and thrust her tongue into his mouth.

XV

THE MELODRAMATIC—yet in a sense very real—self-directed threat he had uttered to Sheklov had had a curious stabilising effect on Turpin's mind. It couldn't just be the tranquilliser; during his twenty-five-year balancing act, he had faced all kinds of crises from the risk of divorce to full-scale investigations of Energetics General by a House committee, and he had relied on drugs time and again to tide him over. He knew what they could and couldn't do.

This state of mind was unique—a

sensation as though a shaft of ice had been thrust clear from his crown to the base of his spine.

And the chill seemed to pervade every nook and cranny of his being. Ordinarily, while a veetol was hovering on its jets waiting for clearance into a traffic-lane, he was a trifle scared—particularly when, as now, there was deep water underneath.

Today, though, the notion of having a thousand feet of nothing between him and disaster didn't trouble him in the least. It was almost enjoyable. He had discovered a sort of pride in his own resilience. He knew better than to surrender to it—pride could be as dangerous as panic—but Sheklov had convinced him that exposure was far from unavoidable after all. (*Damn the man! his subconscious added silently. Sabotage by the Navy, or another company, should have occurred to me, not to him!*)

The situation was bad. It didn't have to be irremediable. It had better not be.

He had left Russia too soon to learn the same yoga techniques as Sheklov—they had not been adopted until long after his injection into the States—but trial and error had taught him what he needed to think of in order to calm his mind. He concentrated now on the crucial factors, recalling his own earlier recognition of the value of having confidence in one's achievements. Sheklov had told him, more than once since his arrival, that he was still regarded as the most valuable agent ever planted on this continent—and wasn't there truth in that compliment? His position as a senior vice-president of EG was virtually impregnable. Energetics General, in most

people's minds, was synonymous with the sacred concept of continental defence, and he was looked up to by everyone he came in contact with—even by Prexy's backers, despite their being Navy.

Prexy himself as well, of course—but he didn't count for a fart in a bath-tub.

He slacked the buckles of his seat-harness a little as his confidence grew and grew. Yes, he could believe that Sheklov had been sent to him because his cover was perfect. And they did still set store by him Back There. They must. For the good and sufficient reason that he was the one who had coped. He was the one who had remained afloat when so many others had sunk—been tried and executed, or, in a few cases which rankled in his memory, killed by a mob during the bad period of the late seventies when a single month might see as many as two thousand lynchings of political suspects, drug-users, and young men with long hair or beards.

He was in an almost benevolent mood when the reserved area hove in sight and the pilot called, "Mr Turpin! We're going in for a landing now—please tighten your harness."

He was delighted to see how steady his hands were as he gripped the straps.

From the nearby superway it would have been impossible to tell that anything out of the ordinary was occurring in the reserved area. Stands of trees forced with paragibberellins and a rise in the ground concealed the immensely powerful four-engined helicopters which had brought the service crew. Turpin caught only a brief glimpse of them as his pilot—properly conscious of not having a high enough clearance

to enter a reserved area—set down a couple of minutes' walk away. He noticed that their sides were branded with the white figures "33," and tried to recollect more about the members of this team than simply their names.

Hurrying towards them, he saw that around the nearest 'copter several men in the quasi-military uniform of fatigues and technical harness (which, he recalled not without pride, he had been instrumental in having adopted to emphasise the dedicated role these men played in Continental Defence) were milling like ants. With one foot on the ground, the other on the ledge of the 'copter's door, a blond man in his middle thirties was shooting questions by turns at each of his engineers. Turpin knew him instantly, although he had only met him once or twice, and months ago. That was the crew-boss, Gunnar Sandstrom, about whom security had been so dubious when his appointment came up. Because of the behaviour of the Scandinavian governments, of course, who refused to hand over traitors and deserters.

He had just started to call and wave to attract Sandstrom's attention when the howl of another aircraft battered their ears, rising in the blink of an eye from a drone to an intolerable roar. The shadow of it flickered over Turpin a fraction of a second before the noise hit; reflexively he glanced up at the bright sky, and was blinded—in his haste to leave home, he had forgotten his dark glasses. But he caught a glimpse of its white paint-job, nonetheless, and cursed silently. He had hoped to be here before any of the senior security people showed, to plant his suspicions about inter-corporation sabotage.

Too late now, though. Somebody very top indeed had arrived. That was no ordinary veetol, but a Mach Three type, capable of crossing the continent in barely more than an hour.

Its pilot—if it was piloted, and not automatically controlled—set it down with meticulous accuracy in the middle of the cluster of choppers. Almost before the power had been cut its door was thrown open and a heavy-set man with black hair, wearing a bright blue windbreaker and orange pants, jumped to the ground. Sandstrom, naturally, broke off his conversation with his engineers and went running to meet him.

Turpin felt a brief pang of dismay. This was someone he didn't recognise. He'd hoped at least that they would send an acquaintance of his, sympathetic to EG. Still, there was no alternative to putting a 'bold' face on the matter. He too strode up to the newcomer, as he was checking Sandstrom's redbook.

"Good morning! Or rather, good afternoon!" he said. "I'm Turpin of Energetics General. I left home as soon as I heard what had happened." He offered his hand.

The black-haired man looked at it for a while, not moving to take it, and then raised piercing eyes to Turpin's face.

"Redbook?" he murmured.

Almost, Turpin let it be seen how insulted he felt, but he recovered in time and meekly produced the document—adding, as he handed it over, "Good afternoon to you too, Gunnar. Walked into a hornet's nest, didn't you?"

The crew-boss, looking troubled, didn't answer.

"Right," the dark-haired man said, handing Turpin's redbook back. "I'm—"

Turpin interrupted. "Yours too, please!"

They locked gazes for a moment. Then the newcomer chuckled and reached towards his hip pocket.

"Yes, by all means, Mr. Turpin. Correct procedure—oh, *shit!*"

As he touched his pocket, a yammering alarm had gone off.

He did something under his sweat-patched left armpit, and the row stopped, and he finally produced the redbook. "Sorry!" he muttered with some embarrassment. "New model alarm. Very efficient. But in the heat of the moment . . ."

The words tailed away.

Pleased to have rattled the security man, Turpin opened the redbook. Even before he read the first page, he had a strong idea of what he was going to find. Only the handful of key personnel who master-minded security throughout the States had those personalised alarm-systems in their clothes. Nonetheless what he discovered amazed him. Apart from redbook #000 000 001, which was allotted to Prexy, he had never seen such comprehensive clearances. "Morton Kendall Clarke," he read. "Substantive bailiff, acting warden, United States Security Force. Seconded Continental Defence HQ."

Then: five pages of departmental stamps, four of special authorisations enabling him to assume command of army, navy, police and National Guard detachments in emergency; the usual warning to the civil population that resisting his orders carried a term of not less than one year's jail . . .

It was too much. He slapped it shut

and gave it back. Clarke tucked it away with a self-conscious grin, as though all too aware of how it must have affected Turpin.

"Right!" he said, turning to Sandstrom. "Let's have the details again from the top."

Sandstrom glanced at Turpin, but all the latter could do was nod. You didn't argue with a redbook like Clarke's. The crew-boss began to recite in a manner as impersonal as a machine.

"We set down here at fourteen-oh-three. Random-schedule maintenance assignment serial H-506-oblique-828-oblique-97. I deployed my crew in the prescribed manner. My aide, Leo Wilkie over there"—he pointed at a freckle-faced young man with a shock of tow-coloured hair—"set about deploying the status-check gear for use when the site had been pronounced A-OK. Immediately he fired up the lice-counter, he drew my attention to . . ." He interrupted himself. "Uh—sorry. I mean the live-circuit remote-condition reader."

"I know what you mean," Clarke snapped. "Go on."

"Yes, sure." Sandstrom licked his lips. "Well, right away we both realised something was wrong. Should have been displaying the regular pattern bright as day. And the screen stayed dead. I knew there wasn't a fault in the unit because it came fresh from overhaul this morning."

"So what did you do then?"

"Sounded the recall siren and told the crewmen what I suspected. And Leo exchanged their routine gear for—uh—the appropriate equipment. In fact, by that time one of the crews, making for the master switching bunker, had had their own suspicions

aroused. The locks on the bunker door were not at their former setting. The door is four-inch sintered-ceramic, a kind of artificial ruby, with . . . But I guess you've been to lots of these sites."

"Yes," Clarke said. "So? What next?"

"I ordered a top-to-bottom check of the site. Didn't want to risk the chance that we'd been issued with data which actually related to somewhere else."

"Has that ever happened to you?"

"No, sir, never. But we were warned in training not to proceed if it did happen."

"I see. Go on."

"Well"—Sandstrom made a helpless gesture—"we satisfied ourselves the site really was shut down. So I sent out the alarm."

"When?"

"I logged that, sir," the freckle-faced Leo broke in. "Fifty-three minutes after we landed."

"Fifty-three minutes!" Clarke exploded. "Nearly an hour! And now . . ." He checked his watch. "Now it's an hour and a half later still! What the hell were you doing all that time?"

Listening, Turpin recognised the faint whine that sharpened his voice, and shivered. He knew many people like this, more women than men but plenty of men too, who had let petty power go to their heads and enjoyed stamping on the least suggestion of dilatoriness or incompetence among their subordinates . . . and were always full of excuses for their own shortcomings. He knew, and suspected that Clarke knew too, that checking out a site of this complexity in an hour was fast work.

Unfortunately, of course, when it

comes to someone who holds a redbook like Clarke's, you can't talk about "petty" power . . .

Sandstrom had stiffened, his mouth tensing as though he wanted to snap back but dared not. He said in a dead tone, "What I was doing, *sir*, was acting in accordance with my instruction manual. That's to say, evaluating the status of every potentially deadly item of equipment in the reserved area in order to protect my crewmen from accidental injury. If that's a satisfactory answer, I'll proceed to what I did after sending out the alarm."

"So tell me," Clarke said with a scowl.

"I deployed half my men along the beach, under orders to look for any sign of someone coming from the sea who might have sabotaged the installation. And I deployed the other half into the woods and along the track leading to the superway, with the same—"

"Gunnar!" A top-of-the-lungs shout. They spun around. On the dirt road leading towards this spot, a man running and calling and waving, obviously very agitated. "Gunnar this way, quick!"

And, a couple of minutes later, Turpin, Clarke, Sandstrom and two members of the maintenance crew were staring down at a footprint on the side of a now-dry puddle—or rather, at half a footprint. Only the sole had left a mark. But that was clear enough for the brand-name to be read.

XVI

WELL AHEAD of the scheduled time for Magda's meeting with her client, Danty had left the apartment, revelling

in the sensation of not being driven to do things whose outcome he could not foresee. He had sometimes tried to describe his—his. . . . No, the word didn't exist. Say "premonitions?" That was absolutely wrong. "Previsions?" Wrong again. Fits of clairvoyance, perhaps . . .

Anyway: he had tried to describe them, and failed. They were an abstract, like hunger and thirst, and could only be assuaged by letting himself drift until he found the proper course of action, and pursued it. Occasionally there was a tingling or throbbing at the back of his head.

Today, however, he was luxuriously able to relax. He enjoyed that so much that for well over two hours he simply wandered about the city, saying hello now and then to his acquaintances. He had very few friends, and no close ones except Magda.

Eventually, however, he spotted a family climbing towards a hoverhalt carrying beach-gear, off for a swim, and decided on the spur of the moment to join them. The shore would be crowded, of course; today was dry and clear and not unbearably hot. Here on the Cowville side the sand was not as carefully cleansed as over by the towers of Lakonia—still, by current standards, New Lake was outstanding. Few people cared to go to the ocean any more, even if they lived within easy reach. The water was too foul. And as for rivers . . . !

But in New Lake you could swim without risking instant diarrhoea and pharyngitis, and half a mile from shore you could climb on to a bobbing plastic platform and stare at Lakonia and daydream. Even blacks could daydream.

Besides, they could scoff at cocks who were due for overnight agony and lobster-redness in the morning.

When he scrambled down from the hoverhalt by the lake, one among a hundred all with the same idea, he headed straight for a rental booth where two dollars obtained you a towel. That was all you had to have. Some fine Sundays they rented five thousand towels. Judging by the length of the line ahead of him, today might top the previous high.

But before he came within ten places of the head of the line, a familiar tingling started at his nape, and slowly spread.

Oh, no! he pleaded silently, and stood fast, trying to disregard it. Eventually, however, it reached the point where—he knew from experience—he had to respond, or suffer night after night of sleepless worrying, guessing at answers for the question which could never be answered: “Suppose I had . . . ?”

Furious, within a minute of reaching the rental booth, he broke out of the line and stared wildly about him. No one paid much attention to his behaviour, except the girl behind him, who was so eager to get in the water she was undressing already. You got these crazy screwheads by the beach all the time.

He had very little money on him, as usual. He seldom carried more than twenty dollars, enough for car-fare and public toilets. One of the advantages of the beach was that it passed a whole day for next to nothing.

Yet his attention fixed abruptly on something he would never ordinarily have bothered with: a telescope, on a

block of concrete overlooking the lake, with an engraved map of the Lakonia towers beside it—out of date by three building-projects—and the usual time-switched coin-machine controlling its shutter.

Yes. That. But why in the name of . . . ?

He sighed and walked towards it. Now, a few people did glance at him, puzzled. When money was so scarce, why waste it on peering through a telescope?

He agreed. He agreed entirely. Nonetheless he pushed his dollar into the slot and closed his eyes, *feeling* without reference to the map where he ought to point the 'scope. At once a dozen naked kids, of both sexes, who had doubtless failed to persuade their parents to give them money for the same thing, came rushing to beg a brief glimpse of Lakonia.

He ignored them, even though they tugged at his pants so hard they threatened to pull them down. It wouldn't have bothered anyone but him if they'd succeeded, of course; his balls weren't anything special to look at.

He re-opened his eyes just as the corroded and badly-serviced timing device on the shutter consented to admit that his coin was valid. It sprang aside—not all the way, but far enough. A three-quarter circle of brilliant sun-drenched sand appeared, backed by the colourful Lakonia towers. On the sand a veetol was standing, dwarfed by the buildings beyond, and its bright blue paint was marked with the symbol of Energetics General, a stylised star transfixed by a lightning bolt.

A man approached it at a stumbling run, mopping his forehead as he went. He looked familiar. But for an agonis-

ing instant Danty thought the handkerchief he was using would prevent a clear sight of his face. Then, though, he shoved it in his pocket as he made to climb the veetol's steps.

Christ! Turpin!

Almost before its door was shut, the veetol howled heavenwards, and Danty turned away from the 'scope, to the amazement of the children around him, who took a full ten seconds before they started quarrelling over who should make first use of the time bought and not expended.

"Reeky pigs," Potatohead said as he drew on his pants—but not too loudly. The pig who had told them to quit the beach was still within earshot. And gunshot.

"Mm-hm," Shark said, squatting on the sand to empty some of it out of his shoes. "Funky traitors."

The pig happened to be about the same colour as they were.

"Whother fart youter do'un?" Josh said, coming back from an ice-cream concession holding three overbalancing cones of pale blue, yellow and pink.

"Nosser much wha'we doon," Potatohead grunted. "Mo' whother 'adiated cop think we shudna!"

Josh stared at them for a moment. Then, in a gesture of all-embracing disgust, he hurled the ice-creams to the ground and stamped on them. Nearby, a child who had been watching with large envious eyes broke into a howl of misery and would have charged up and pummelled Josh but that his father seized him by the ankle and tripped him—which led to still louder howls.

"Chrahssek" Josh blasted. "Youter doan'spen'nough tahn uppie chothers'

cricks? Lahk youer hanna blow, hunh? 'Zat it?"

"We-yull . . ." Potatohead shuffled from one foot to the other, reincarnating Uncle Tom to the life.

"Ah, y'make muh wan'thro-wup!" Josh snarled. "'Y'knoh they duller'nyun bu' gulls scroona beach! Fay-yud! Makun fast! Ah dwonna know youter babbohs 'fo' y'eads get stray-yut! Heah muh? Ah s'd fay-yud!"

Briefly, Shark looked as though he might hurl himself at Josh; the latter, though, kicked with bare toes at the pants he had left folded on the sand and parted folds of cloth to reveal the handle of his knife. He was very fast with it, much faster than his buddies—which was a good reason for him to give the orders.

"Ah, piss'nya!" Shark sighed at length, and turned away.

Turpin getting into a company veetol at a run—and on a Sunday afternoon! Head down, strolling randomly along the beach and attracting cat-calls on every side, not only from girls, proposing reasons why he should have his pants on—mostly connected with needing a magnifying-glass—Danty struggled to make sense of the situation.

If it did have anything to do with him, and past experience indicated that he wouldn't have *felt* it if it didn't, then it must connect up by way of the reserved area which he'd left turned off. Why? *Why?* That was the best possible guarantee that the security force would come running!

Of course, no one would be able to link him personally with what he'd done. Before leaving, he had meticulously wiped everything he recalled

touching, and his memory was good. The rock he'd hidden beside was below the tide-mark, and he'd gone to it over firm dry ground patched with dune-grass, so—

He stopped dead. Just ahead of him, some tenderfoot had stepped in a patch of damp sand, and the mark of a plastic sandal stood out as clear as a plaster-of-Paris cast. And he remembered.

That puddle, where he'd collected mud to smear on his face! He'd seen—and he'd done nothing about—that print he'd left on its edge . . . and since Friday morning there had been no more rain!

"Josh!"

"Ah, shit! Wh'n Ah sa' fay-yud, Ah mean fay-yud!" Josh sat up, hand snaking towards his pants and the hilt of his knife.

"Nah, coolun!" Shark insisted. "Tha' slug dun-s'all wrong—tha' Dan'y Wohd!"

Instantly Josh forgot everything else. He turned very slowly to face them, eyes blank behind his dark glasses.

"Sawun?"

"Sho'! Raht hyah onna *be-yutch!*"

There was a pause full of the cries of kids playing ball. At length Josh nodded and began to pull on his clothes.

"Sho'un way, hm?" he said. "We got sco' t'level wi-yat mother."

XVII

A FEW MINUTES AFTER the discovery of the footprint, a second security vee-tol dropped out of the sky—not such a fast model as Clarke's, but much larger, bringing a top forensic team with all their gear. Under Clarke's di-

rection they set about turning the site inside-out.

Turpin found himself compelled to trail at Clarke's heels, not a role he relished. He was used to being the focus of attention where anything connected with Energetics General was concerned. Now and then he tried to involve himself in one of Clarke's conversations.

"Think that print will give you a lead to—?"

"Hell, no. Second commonest brand on the market, fourth commonest size!" And back to a technical discussion with the forensic experts.

"Whoever did it came down the track, as I see it, and then—"

"Doesn't follow." With even greater curttness. "We shan't know until we've finished searching the beach."

So Turpin, anxious, withdrew into the background and smoked a rapid succession of cigarettes, his earlier confidence oozing away under the simultaneous pressure of Clarke's snubbing and the glare from the sunlight on the sand, which threatened to give him a headache. He was on the point of confronting Clarke directly and saying that he was going home because he was tired of wasting time, when the men working over the beach discovered something that made his heart lurch.

In a direct line between the dirt road and the sea, a probing metal rod had come back from six inches underground smeared with some sort of sticky plastic goo.

Oh, my God. Sheklov's survival suit!

None of his reaction showed in his face, of course, or his manner. He had had far too long to practise concealment of his emotions. Moreover, he had been assured that the destruct

process left no single compound in the mess which could be identified as of foreign origin.

But suppose they underestimated the impact of thirty years' paranoia on our forensic techniques?

He wondered briefly what "they" and "our" meant to him nowadays.

Now it was definite. He would not dare to leave here before he had planted in Clarke's mind the seed of the suspicion Sheklov had proposed: the idea that some rival corporation, or the Navy, had decided to undermine confidence in EG's ability to fulfil its defence contracts.

Waiting for his chance, he stood by while the forensic team, with the patience of archaeologists, uncovered the mass of mingled plastic and sand. It bore no resemblance to the form of a human being. Turpin realised with relief. It had been folded roughly square, and the destruct process had caused streets of plastic to flow away from its edge like pseudopods around a sick amoeba. He waited tensely for Clarke's opinion of the find.

"What do you think?" the security man said finally to the nearest of his aides.

The man shrugged. "Garbage," he answered. "One of those self-destruct bags you have on yachts, chucked overboard and washed up here."

"That's what it looks like to me," Clarke agreed. "But take a sample to the lab just in case. And keep on looking. Say—uh—Turpin! I'd like a word with you now."

He gestured for the older man to fall in at his side, and led the way towards the vegetation fringing the shore. As he walked he produced and offered a

pack of cigars, a good West Coast brand.

Accepting one, Turpin decided to risk a bit of deduction himself. He said, "Did you get hauled back from a vacation?"

"Not exactly," Clarke grunted. "Just my first free weekend in two months. I was out in Oregon last week, and I have cousins in Frisco, so I thought I'd take the chance to call on them. Then this blows up, so fast I don't even have the time to change clothes! Hah!" He bit the end off his cigar and spat it savagely into a nearby bush.

Well, that would excuse some of his bad manners . . . Offering a light, Turpin ventured, "Have you drawn any conclusions yet? Naturally, on behalf of EG, I'm very concerned about all this."

"Whereas I have to be concerned about it on behalf of the whole nation," Clarke said, with the air of a man scoring a debating-point.

"Naturally!" Turpin agreed, lighting his own cigar. "But, you see—"

"Just a moment." Clarke pushed his cigar to the corner of his mouth, where it jutted up at the traditional tycoon's angle, and reached into one of the pockets of his windbreaker. He drew out something of shiny metal, about six inches long when unfolded, touched a switch at its base, and—holding it about the height of his mouth—turned through a complete circle. A high-pitched hum made Turpin's teeth ache slightly.

"Parabolic mike detector?" he said after a pause.

"Yes. And it's okay. No one is eavesdropping right now." Clarke folded the gadget and put it away. "Sorry, but I had to make absolutely

certain, because of what I want to ask you. Turpin, how well do you know these service crews of EG's?"

"I know some of them in fair detail," Turpin said, wondering if he was about to receive a gift from the gods. It certainly sounded as though he was. "As to this one, thirty-three—well, rather less than some."

"I noticed you call the crew-boss by his first name," Clarke probed.

"Oh, that's company policy," Turpin said with an easy smile. "Executives call crew-bosses by their first names, their juniors by their surnames. It goes for both sexes."

"I see. But it's rather an *unusual* name, isn't it—Gunnar?"

Ah!

Smoothly, never saying anything outright which might be interpreted as an accusation, Turpin laid down parameters for Clarke's thinking: someone who felt handicapped by a foreign name, possibly suspecting that he'd been passed over for promotion because of it, might so easily have listened to blandishments from another company, hoping to augment the income he regarded as less than his just due . . . He managed to refer to EG's excellent record on industrial espionage, then to the intense competition against which the firm had secured the automatic defences contract, then to the clean bill which every House committee had given them after an investigation, and all the time Clarke listened intently, now and then making a further check with his detector.

At last he gave a thoughtful nod. He said, "I guess you must have studied Sandstrom's file."

"Seen it, certainly," Turpin said, blinking. "Can't swear to having

memorised it, naturally."

"I seem to recall, though"—with a frown—"he gave one special reason for moving into high-grade electronics, didn't he?"

"Ah . . ." Simultaneous, a search of memory and preparation of an adequate excuse for not remembering. Memory dealt him a trump just in time. "Why, yes! I do know what you mean! Didn't it have something to do with a childhood fascination with the space programme?"

"So he deposed," Clarke agreed, slipping his detector back in his pocket for the fourth or fifth time. And then, just as Turpin was preparing to congratulate him on being able to pick that single entry out of heaven knew how many security files—which, indeed, was a rather sobering feat and indicated just why Clarke was as high as he was in the hierarchy of his force—he did something which took Turpin absolutely by surprise. He bent to the ground, caught up a small rock, and hurled it as far as he could.

"Did you see *that* go into orbit?" he demanded savagely. And added, before Turpin could frame words to reply with: "Come on—better get back and see if my men have turned up anything else."

XVIII

"I GUESS THAT'S THE PLACE," Lora said doubtfully, slowing the car alongside a vacant parking-bay and pointing across the street to an ugly old building with a hoverhalt on its roof.

"Yes!" she added, craning to read a sign pointing to it. "I remember the name. Right first time—not bad, hm?"

She backed into the bay and jumped out. Copying her, Sheklov stared at the building. It was shabby, with great cracks in its walls which were only prevented from spreading by the reinforced concrete beams doing double duty as supports for the steel stairs up to the hoverhalt. They had arrived at the same time as a hovercar, and he could see the wall trembling under the extra load.

He shook his head. He hoped he wasn't going to have to spend long in this paradoxical country: so rich, yet with so many people in it prepared to suffer intolerable indignities!

Having stuffed five bucks into the nearby meter—the regular fee for two hours' parking on a Sunday—Lora caught his arm and hurried him across the street. On the steep stairs of the hoverhalt he lost sight of her as the hovercar discharged a crowd of people numbering only about twenty but blocking the width of the steps as efficiently as a small army, then caught up with her again on the landing outside the topmost apartment, where she was already ringing the bell.

Shortly, the door was opened to a security stop by a woman with a strong face and coarse black hair, who could have been any age from thirty to fifty, wearing a casual red sweater and tan pants. Her expression, resigned at first, changed in a moment to one of welcome.

"Oh! I wasn't expecting anyone, so I thought it might be the pigs—or one of my clients turning up without an appointment. But you're Lora Turpin, aren't you? Come on in!"

She released the security stop and flung the door wide.

Lora hesitated, while Sheklov's eyes

seized greedily on what details of the interior of the apartment he could make out from where he stood. Books—twenty times as many as in the whole of the Turpin's home! An ouija board, hung from the wall on a bit of string! Visible on a low table, abandoned presumably when the bell rang, a tarot pack!

It was like coming home.

So who was this woman, anyway—Danty's mistress? That seemed unlikely. Vaguely he heard Lora asking whether Danty was in; equally vaguely, he registered the reply: "No, but he could be back at any time. Please come in and wait if you'd like to."

"Well . . ." Lora looked to Sheklov for guidance.

"That's very kind!" he exclaimed, and this time took her arm, encouraging her over the threshold. "Apparently you know Lora," he added. "I'm Don Holtzer."

"Oh, yes. Danty said he met you at the Turpins'. I'm Magda Hansen." Shutting the door and waving them to chairs. "Do sit down. Maybe you'd like some coffee?"

"Please," Sheklov said firmly.

"I'll go plug the percolator in. Just a moment." And she headed for the miniature kitchen in the corner.

Out of the side of her mouth, looking ill-at-ease, Lora whispered, "But that's the—uh—the girl Danty's living with. I saw her when I woke up this morning. That was why I . . ."

"Turned tail?" Sheklov supplied equally softly, finally putting two and two together. "Well, she doesn't seem to mind your coming to call, does she?"

And that was all he had the chance to say before she was back and sitting down on one of the built-in couches,

facing them. Recollecting her tarot cards, she leaned forward to gather them up. Sheklov decided to risk commenting on them.

"That's an unusual deck you have there. Is it what they call—uh—tarrot?" Mispronouncing it deliberately.

"Yes." Collapsing the cards with strong thick fingers into a neat pile. "Haven't you seen them before? Like to look?"

"Well, thanks," Sheklov said, reaching to the full stretch of his arm to take them from her. He realised at once they were a design he didn't know. But good. The hanged man, in particular: a negro surrounded by hooded Klansmen. Very apt. He gave them back, and Magda turned to park them on a vacant section of one of the many bookshelves at her back.

"Did you say you thought it might be police at the door?" he inquired, since Lora appeared to be tongue-tied.

"Could have been," Magda said with a sigh. "Those radiated pigs are on a harassment kick right now—come crashing in, mostly on Sundays or in the middle of the night—just to turn everything over and make a mess. If they break a few things, so much the better."

"But—uh—what excuse do they have for . . . ?" Sheklov let the question trail away, thinking of the days when that had been the perennial nightmare of anyone on the other side who had dared to reveal an original turn of mind.

Magda gave a shrug. "Oh, they always say 'suspicion of illegal drugs', you know. But that's so much shit. It's just the thing they don't need a warrant for. Fact is, they hate rebs, and that's all there is to it."

"I see," Sheklov said, for want of any better comment. He felt at a loss. This woman, much older than Danty, had a similar disconcerting quality in her dark gaze and in her tone of voice. He could almost imagine himself saying something to her, as he had done to Danty, which would be a betrayal of his cover, and without being able to help it even though he realised it was happening.

Still, he had to put some questions about Danty because of what had already happened. He said, "Ah . . . ! Well, if it's Danty they're after, I can't see why. I talked to him a bit at the party last night, and he seemed to be very—uh—serious. Sort of thoughtful. And well-read, too," he added as an afterthought.

"Yes!" Lora chimed in. "That's why Don wanted to see him again. Wasn't it, Don?"

"Yes. Yes, of course."

There was a dead silence, during which Magda looked—not discourteously, just searchingly—at both of them in turn for long seconds. She said at last, "And, of course, the pigs don't like foster-rebs, either."

Meaning herself, Sheklov deduced. The term had been included in his briefings. It applied to an older person who actively encouraged the young to drop out of society in search of some allegedly superior truth. A few states had incorporated it into their criminal codes, making such encouragement an offence for which the parents of minors could sue, by analogy with "alienation of affection" in the old British common law.

Shades of Socrates and the hemlock!
"Corrupting our youth!"

"I get the impression," Sheklov said

slowly, not looking directly at Magda, "that over the border we—you know I'm Canadian?"

"Danty did mention it."

Was there mockery in those dark eyes? Had she seen through his pretence? He couldn't tell. He ploughed doggedly on.

"Well, we seem to understand something different by the word reb. I mean, it's not something the police would—uh . . ." A wave of his hand.

"Down here the police pounce on anyone who's in the slightest degree different," Magda said. "Anyone who tries to think for himself, to begin with—they're the most dangerous of all. Every loyal citizen is convinced that the government is right, even if today it says the exact opposite of what it said yesterday. Not that that happens so much any more. We've decayed into what they call a consensus." She made the word sound faintly obscene.

"You mean—" Lora began. Magda cut her short.

"What I mean is that the government of this country is killing us. Stone-dead. By slow strangulation."

She jolted forward on her couch, her face suddenly animated, and Sheklov realised with a start that she was beautiful—not in the conventional American, or even the conventional Russian, sense, which had more to do with mere glamour, but in the ancient sense of the Gioconda or the Venus di Milo. It was as though a light had been switched on inside her head which illuminated her true personality. Also, in contrast with the shrill whine of almost every other woman he had met since his arrival—most notably, Sophie Turpin and her mother—her voice was a resonant contralto, cello-forceful.

"And it's a tough job for them," she said. "Because in every generation you get a handful of people who won't just be crushed into the regulation mould. Don't you? The ones who want to be—oh—inventors, rather than engineers, or poets rather than copywriters, or architects rather than building-contractors. Peg it?"

"I guess so," Sheklov said, and added wryly, "Likewise, ecologists rather than timber-salesmen."

"You peg," she said, and this time smiled at him—just with her eyes, wrinkling the lids humorously. "So what happens when you block off all their opportunities to explore and experiment as they want to? You get rebs. Hell, you're bound to."

"Well—sure you are!" Sheklov said, blinking. "So . . . ?"

"So they get stamped on," Magda said. "Like I said."

"But—"

"But why? Oh, I know it's crazy. I know we're so rich we ooze money like—like fat dripping off roast pork. I know we ought to be able to tolerate a fraction of one percent of young people who'd rather sit and think than fit into the machine. But people seem to resent their need to do that, don't they?"

Sheklov swallowed hard, wondering what Holtzer ought to say, and was saved the trouble. Lora spoke up.

"I know just what you mean!" she exclaimed. "Lots of times I think inside my head there's something going on which isn't in the books they make you read in school. It makes me want to do crazy things now and then really crazy, just to shake everybody up. And they don't even *notice!*" The last word was almost a cry.

"So what do you do about it?" Magda said.

"I . . ." She licked her lips. Eventually she shook her head and stared down at her hands, folded in her lap.

"See, Don?" Magda said. "That's what a foster-reb like me is trying to stop. Someone like Lora ought to be able to—to *go* somewhere, *do* something, stack up new experience and dig around among it in case the answer's somewhere underneath."

"I—uh—I guess I can see you have a case there," Sheklov said cautiously. "But what one hears about the result . . ."

"You mean the popular picture of a reb?" Magda interrupted. "I guess if you're Canadian" (did she lay too much stress on that or was his imagination working overtime?) "you've been fooled by the media. I'm not talking about fakes, phoneys, borderline psychopaths, what they used to wrap up under one handy label like 'beat' or 'hippie'. That went out of style when the courts started holding that long hair was *prima-facie* proof of vagrancy because it meant you couldn't pay the barber, and the pigs grunted with joy and reached for their guns!"

Reflexively Sheklov touched his chin. Back there he'd sported a beard. Why not, in an area where the winter temperatures regularly dipped to -30° Centigrade?

"Yeah, beards too," Magda agreed. "And when that happened the phoneys folded up and went home. Leaving just the few, just the handful, who couldn't be folded up. And what can they do? If they apply for a passport, the pigs come running and turn over their homes, grill their families, their friends, until no one wants to know them any

more. 'Everything's great here, why should you want to leave?'—that's the principle, and saying you're curious about the rest of the world is no excuse. You've been told all your life that this country is the best, the finest, the most wonderful. So they want to know why you aren't satisfied. And how can you say why you aren't? You haven't done the things that might tell you!"

"But if you do try and leave, you have to leave for good!" Lora burst out. "I've thought about it, and—and I just daren't! I might get shot at the border!"

"A lot of people do," Magda sighed. "Which is why most rebs go exploring in a different direction altogether."

Sheklov looked at the ouija board, the tarot deck, various other significant items on display. He said at last, "You must mean—inside their heads."

"Yes." Magda gave him a puzzled look. "I usually have to spell that out to people when I'm defending the rebs. I guess north of the border you aren't quite so calcified, hm? But that's the long and short of it, yes."

"How did you get involved with these rebs?" Sheklov queried. "If you don't mind my asking."

Magda seemed to be overcome with a fit of self-consciousness. She said, avoiding his eyes, "Oh . . . ! Oh, I guess I was one of the half-and-half cases. Sometimes I felt I ought to stand up for what I believed in, and sometimes I was just lazy enough to coast along with the gang, and I drifted into a marriage on that basis. Which turned sour, and taught me—much too late—that my laziness was a crime against myself. And, too, I found out that I have . . ."

"Yes?" Sheklov prompted.

"I have a talent," Magda said after a brief hesitation, and pointed at the card in the window. It was so thin the word CONSULTATIONS could be read on it, backwards, against the light sky of late afternoon. "You see," she continued, licking her lips, "I do have more—uh—empathy than some people. I trained as a nurse when I quit college, thinking maybe I'd go to work for the Red Cross or some other international aid organisation, in some broken-backed poverty-stricken country. It turned out I wasn't allowed to, because—well, because I'd been kind of wild as a kid and they wouldn't give a passport to anyone with a drug-bust on their record. Smoking pot was all, but quite enough. So here I am, a professional shoulder to weep on in an age when most people won't admit they can cry. Won't even confide in their best friends. It doesn't require a licence, so that's cool."

Sheklov was framing his next question, when Lora spoke up again unexpectedly. She said, "Say—uh—Magda! Does Danty have any kind of talent? I kind of wondered when . . . Did he tell you how we met? He saved my life!"

Sheklov rounded on her in astonishment. There was something so brittle and superficial about this girl, hearing her utter a statement like that jolted him.

But Magda was nodding as though it were perfectly natural to say such things. "Oh, that Danty!" she said, in a tone which cross-bred cynicism with affection. "He has a talent, sure has. Know what he always says about himself?"

Lora shook her head, her eyes hungry.

"Ever read *The Sword in the Stone*? Yes? Remember Merlin the magician?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Well, Danty always says he's in the same mess, born at the wrong end of time. You see, he—"

There came a scratching at the door, the sound of a key being fumbled into the lock. She broke off and swung around to face that way. So did the others. The door flew wide.

Danty stood there, swaying drunkenly, lips drawn back in a grimace of pain, eyes almost closed, a crusting cut on his forehead, and a great blood-gushing slash on his left arm which now, letting fall his key, he struggled again to staunch with his red right hand.

"Help me," he whispered faintly, and fell headlong.

XIX

LORA SCREAMED.

Galvanised by the sound, Sheklov leapt from his chair. He slapped the door shut at the full reach of his arm and dropped to his knees beside Danty.

"Shut up!" he rasped at Lora. "Go find a phone, call a doctor! Magda, help me get him on the couch! We'll need ice—scissors—bandages—"

Coolly she undercut him, bending over his shoulder to inspect Danty's wound. "I did train as a nurse, remember?" she murmured. And put one hand accurately on a pressurepoint which reduced the surging leakage of blood to an ooze.

"Oh. Yes, of course. Sorry." Sheklov rose.

"And you?" she pursued. "Are you trained in medicine, too?"

What have I said now? Sheklov's mind raced. But almost at once he hit on a good reason for Holtzer to know first-aid.

"Hell, yes! Do you have any idea how many lumbermen lose arms and legs to power-saws every year? Must be hundreds!"

"Good, then," Magda said. "Lora, bring ice-cubes, will you? And you'll find a box in the corner of the kitchen—top shelf—marked with a red cross. I'll need that."

"What about calling a doctor?" Sheklov snapped. "Don't you have a phone?"

Magda gave him a steady look. "Think I can afford indemnity insurance?"

"What?"

"It's very clear you're not American! You want a doctor who makes house-calls, you have to pay insurance against his being mugged or robbed on the way to you. In Cowville the going rate's a thousand a month." She added after a moment, "Anyway, Danty's black, and no white doctor would treat him, and I wouldn't dare call a black one. Help me lift him to that couch—no, just a moment, I'll put a sheet on it."

He left a bloody trail on the floor.

After that Sheklov reacted mechanically as Magda efficiently cut away Danty's sleeve, wiped the knife-wound—that was what it had to be, an inch wide and more than that deep—and sprayed it in turn with an analgesic, an antibiotic powder, and finally with a clear solution from an aerosol can. Reading the label on this last before Lora dutifully returned it to the first-aid kit, Sheklov learned that it was intended to create a film impervious

to airborne infection which would contract as it dried and draw the edges of a cut together, obviating the need to insert stitches.

Hmm! That would be useful at home! A fine invention! On the other hand, he wouldn't care to live in a society which found it necessary to include such a product in a home first-aid kit. . . .

Then the final touches: rinsing of Danty's face—his cut forehead was minor, hardly more than a scratch, although his eyes would be puffy for a day or two, Magda predicted—and the job of clearing up, which Lora undertook silently, despite her faintly green cheeks and look of incipient nausea. Magda complimented her a couple of times on being so helpful, and she flashed smiles of gratitude in response.

Sheklov recalled what she had said about her parents not taking an interest in their children.

At some point during all this—Sheklov did not notice exactly when—Danty regained consciousness, but apparently figured out what was going on and went on lying quite still. His first word, when Magda had done with him, was, "Thanks!"

"You're all right, Danty?" Lora exploded, and almost let the bowl of pink water she was carrying to the kitchen fall to the floor. Barely in time she recovered, parked it on the table, and fell on her knees at his side.

"Me? Sure, baby, I'm okay. I'm tough!" Danty said, ruffling her hair. "Let me sit up, hm? That's the idea!"—as she twisted around to support him behind his shoulders. Touching his arm, he winced, and added, "I

guess this may need a sling for a day or two, Magda!"

"Lora, go look behind that curtain, by my bed. There's a bagful of rags," Magda said, and Lora departed at a run. She added to Danty, "Who did it—Josh?"

"I'm not sure whether Josh beat Shark to it, or the other way around," Danty sighed. "They took me completely by surprise. Jumped me near the hoverhalt as I was coming off the beach."

"You know who did this to you?" Sheklov said, astonished. "Shouldn't you—uh—report it, then? Or something?" he added lamely.

"To the pigs?" Danty said with a cynical grin. "Man, I should die laughing the day the pigs do anything for me! More like they'd give Josh a medal."

"Is this long enough?" Lora called, waving a piece of blue cloth around the corner of the curtain which hid Magda's sleeping-alcove. Magda held out her hand for it, and after tugging hard on its ends folded and tied it to make a sling.

"Great, baby," Danty said, having tried it out. "Say, I guess I should thank you all, shouldn't I? Don—Lora . . . Lora, honey! Shit, what you crying for?"

She was struggling not to, but tears were pouring down her cheeks and she was clamping her hands together to stop them shaking.

"Give her a trunk!" Danty said, and interrupted himself. "No, got a better idea. Any of that vodka left that Punchy gave us?"

"Sure is!" Magda said, snapping her fingers, and headed for the kitchen. She was back in a moment with mis-

matched glasses and a bottle half-full. According to its label, Sheklov noted, the contents were made in Schenectady, New York. This wasn't like the Vyborova he drank at home, but it helped, and he set his empty glass aside gratefully. It was only when he found Danty offering the bottle for a refill that he realised he had drunk it Russian-style, in a gulp, instead of sipping it like the rest of them.

That, though, apparently wasn't unexpected in the present context. At least, none of them commented.

After a pause to wipe her eyes, Lora said suddenly, "I—uh—I'd like to say something."

"So shoot," invited Danty.

"I . . ." She took the plunge. "I like you! Both of you! You feel *real*."

"That's a change from this morning," Danty chuckled. "I thought you'd set the stairs afire, the speed you left at."

"I know," Lora said, almost inaudibly. "All the time I do stupid things, the exact opposite of what I want . . . I wish *I* could figure out how to explore inside myself, too. I'm sure there's something in there I ought to know about, something that would be worth having. After all, I'm not an idiot. I'm *just*—a furious grimace—"kind of crazy!"

"Aren't we all?" Magda said, and drained her glass. At the same moment there was a shrill ring from behind the curtain, and she jumped up.

"That might be about Molly," she said, answering an unspoken query from Danty. "I left the number at the hospital so they could tell us the news." And vanished.

"Friend of ours," Danty explained. "Pregnant."

"Oh. Is she in the maternity ward?" Sheklov hazarded.

He gave his usual crooked grin. "No. Emergency. They have three kids already and their neighbours aren't talking to them. So her husband threw her downstairs to try and abort her. Broke her pelvis."

"What?" Lora burst out in horror.

"Happens all the time," Danty said, passing his unhurt hand wearily over his face. "Shit, what you expect? We got three hundred sixty million people now, and no way out."

There was silence among them. During it, they heard Magda's voice.

"But how the hell did you get this number? It's unlisted, and I never gave it to Avice!"

"Oh," Danty said softly. "Not Molly. One of her patients—I mean clients. Mustn't say 'patient'. You have to have a licence if you have patients."

Magda again: "Yes! Yes, all right! Thanks for calling. But don't use this number again, and above all don't pass it on to anyone else, is that clear? I don't want to have it changed again!"

And she came back, scowling.

"The Clarke woman?" Danty asked.

"Right in one." She helped herself to more vodka and resumed her seat. "Husband's been called back unexpectedly, so she won't dare come here tomorrow. Christ, can you call that sort of thing a marriage? That's what mine was like, you know, why it broke up. I wasn't allowed to do anything I thought of by myself, or I'd get kicked in the ass for my temerity." She threw her liquor down her throat as though it would drown the memory.

"Danty!" Lora said suddenly, jumping out of her chair and going to sit

at his side. "Are you okay now? Feeling all right?"

"No," Danty said. "I'm feeling lousy—what the hell do you expect, with a crack on the head and a knife-cut?" And relented, reaching up to tousle her hair affectionately. "Don't let it get you down, though. I've had worse things happen to me, and lived through them . . . Say, Mag?"

"Yes?"

"Could we like feed these people? Day's wearing on, and all I had was brunch."

"Well—"

"Hold it!" Sheklov interrupted. "I have a better idea. Why don't we all eat dinner together? My expense. Lora, would you drive us somewhere? Like maybe out of town?"

"Oh, great!" Lora said. "Sure, wonderful! Danty?"

"Well I wouldn't say no, if we can find somewhere that doesn't mind a mixed party," Danty said after a pause. "What about you, Mag?"

"I guess so," she said. "Have to change clothes first, though, if we're going any place—uh—respectable."

So will I," Danty said, getting up. "But I sure wouldn't refuse a square meal. Thanks, Don. We won't be a moment."

He caught Magda by the arm and escorted her through the curtain, out of sight.

The moment they were alone in the sleeping alcove, she rounded on him. Very softly, but very ferociously, because this must not carry to the others, she said, "What the *shit* possessed you to walk into that much trouble?" She tapped his cut arm.

"Had to," was the curt reply. "Just had to. Know what happened this afternoon? Turpin was called out from home to go somewhere very fast in an EG vetol. And I can guess where."

"That reserved area?" Magda said, her eyes fixed on his drawn face.

"Where else? And for some reason it was more important for me to know that than for me to steer clear of where Josh and Shark and Potatohead might find me."

There was an awful dead pause.

"Remember what I said about getting scared?" Danty said at last. "What—what—*what* could be more important than my keeping alive? And I mean that! They were going to cut me into little pieces, and no one would have tried to help! It was my luck that there was a pig somewhere around who wasn't fond of them just now. I got the notion that Shark and Potatohead were like ^{being} having a blow on the beach, and the pig moved them on. So when he saw them again . . ." A vague gesture. "That was all that saved me. I rode the hoverline back here, bleeding all over the car, and you know nobody even offered me a seat?"

"That's America," Magda said.

"Yes." Danty turned away and pulled open the small built-in closet where his clothes were stored. "And you know something? *I want out.*"

"Where to? Africa? Look what happened to the people who went there in the Black Exodus!"

"No, just *out*," Danty said. His voice, still barely above a whisper, suddenly became level and determined. "Any place where this fucking talent would have something solid to work on, instead of walking me into trouble all the time!"

"**T**HAT YOU, MORTON?" Fenella Clarke called as she heard the key clicking in the door. A microphone beside her chair picked up her voice—being directionalised, it did not blur the question by also picking up the sound from the TV she was watching—and conveyed it to the entrance foyer.

"Who the hell else are you expecting who can get through these locks?" her husband retorted. There was a mike focused on him, too.

When she married him, she had thought it romantic, in some indefinable way, to have captured one of the brightest up-and-coming young experts who had undertaken that toughest of all varieties of law-enforcement work: policing the very minds of disloyal citizens. And her confidence had been amply repaid in material terms. Less than five years after their meeting, he had been in a position to buy into the Lakonia towers, and this apartment was among the most choice, with a superb view on every side.

The kind of thing she had not foreseen . . .

Well, that mike beside her chair was an example. (Remembering, she said to it meekly, "Just a figure of speech, honey, you know that!" And heard a grunt by way of response.) The whole place was riddled, permeated, *infested* with bugs. Electronic type. Mostly newly-developed gadgetry which he was field-testing, because his profession was also his hobby.

And, above all, she had never in her life imagined the penalties she was going to have to pay for her comfort. In her memory, she marked the turning-point by Morton's decision to have

a separate bedroom in their Lakonia apartment—not by the acquisition of the apartment itself. It was at that stage that he had reached the point where a Security Force executive began to worry about talking in his sleep. At least, that was what she had worked out in discussions with her friend Avice Donnelly, who was married to a senior plant security officer for Energetics General and hence was regarded as a proper person for Morton Clarke's wife to befriend.

She didn't actually *like* Avice. She found her bitchy, over-fond of gossip and especially of scandal, and given to nursing ridiculous grudges, sometimes for years on end. But one couldn't get along with no friends whatever. Just couldn't! No matter how often Morton indicated that that was the way he would have preferred it.

Every promotion seemed to make things worse. Back when he was a mere agent, and they had been courting, he had appeared to get some kind of *fun* out of his work. That was something she could understand, even appreciate. There was a quality akin to fencing in the person-to-person duels of a subversive and a security agent, and when the results were in, one could stand back and look at the ingenuity that had led to the denouement with honest admiration. "He thought that we would think . . ." Only: "We realised he would think that we would think . . ."

And he'd been promoted to the next grade, keeper, and she'd accepted his proposal of marriage on the spot. He'd been so overjoyed, it was infectious!

The rot set in later. She found out about his promotion to acting bailiff by chance, weeks after it was authorised . . . then to substantive bailiff

only when she answered a call on the secure line while they were discussing the household accounts . . .

She had barely dared to mention all this to anyone except Avice, because if Morton felt he had to keep such data from his wife, how could she talk about it with anyone else?

And, naturally, there was the problem of children. Fenella had hoped to have at least one—people felt that was okay—and had looked forward to the baby's arrival. Except Morton refused to co-operate. A child was vulnerable to being kidnapped by subversives.

She had asked about divorce when that episode overtook her. And been refused. Flatly. *No*. And tomorrow, like Avice, she had meant to pour out her heart to this wonderful woman, this Magda Hansen, who was so sympathetic and understanding and made such fabulous suggestions for getting around obstinate husbands, and . . .

How the hell had Avice brought herself to consult Mrs Hansen, anyway? Avice with her impenetrable shell of self-possession, her tinkly laugh, her air of not giving a fart about anyone or anything—she must have been driven to breaking-point.

Come to think of it, I haven't heard from her in over three weeks! I should have called up . . .

She reached for the cigarette, the latest of far too many today, and glanced towards the door. Wasn't Morton going to come in?

Obviously not. But then, he so often didn't. Just made straight for his den, which she was forbidden to enter unless he was present.

One of these days I'm going to walk in there and smear shit all over all the things he prizes more than me. And then

I'll shoot myself right in the middle of it, the messiest way possible, through the roof of my mouth. See how he likes coming home and finding that lot to clear up!

She turned her attention, with an effort, back to the TV, knowing at the bottom of her mind that she never would.

Stomach grumbling from the sandwich and glass of milk he had gulped down on his way home, at the wrong time—at least as far as his metabolism was concerned (owing to his hasty departure from California)—Morton Clarke wiped his face as he entered his den and closed the door. Tight. With a careful double-check of the locks.

Should have remained a bachelor. No life for a married man, my career.

But, having married, one must stay married. They were instantly suspicious, in the Security Force, of anyone who changed his mind on such an important matter. . . .

He sat down before his desk, which was more of an electronic console because this was his only permissible outlet for personal initiative once he had dedicated his life to the security of his country. Sometimes he thought of himself as akin to a mediaeval monk, sustained only by recollection of a pledge he had given while in full and sober possession of his faculties when the Rule of his order became intolerable. Yes; he must not give way to private preferences, to personal predilections. This afternoon, at the reserved area, he had come perilously close to doing so when he picked up that rock and uttered that fierce remark

to Turpin: "Did you see it go into orbit?"

What went into orbit, these days, from the United States, was the minimum necessary to preserve the nation from the unceasing hostility of the rest of the world. That had been drilled into him ever since, back in college, he had first become aware of the burgeoning commitment within his mind, and realised he was going to find fulfilment only in working for the safety and salvation of his native land.

He raised his eyes to the one item he permitted to decorate his sanctum. It wasn't—as one might have expected—Old Glory, or even a photo of Prexy. He knew too much about the workings of modern American government to have chosen anything of that sort. No: he had fixed to the wall where he could see it any time he looked up something which reminded him of the penalties you had to pay for freedom: a newspaper cutting, glassed and framed, from the Chinese official paper *Red Banner*, and it showed a North Vietnamese official press photo of a captured American pilot being led on a rope halter through the streets of Hanoi. He couldn't read the caption, but a friend of his had translated it for him, and a typed summary had been pasted under the actual cutting. It said that because this man had committed the crime of bombing Angkor Wat he was plainly a hopeless case for re-education—quote/unquote—and hence had been condemned to public ignominy.

Shit! What good are a bunch of ancient ruins when men's minds are in chains?

Sight of that picture, as always, re-stimulated him to the ever-greater urgency of his task. He drew a deep breath and started to punch the various keyboards set into his desk. First off: anti-bug checks.

All clear. No one had located any of the lines with any tapping device known to Security Force experts. He was as safe from eavesdropping here as at the SF headquarters.

Thank heaven . . .

Next, therefore: a summary of things which had occurred to him since leaving the reserved area. The forensic team, naturally, would be there indefinitely, but another top SF executive had arrived half an hour ago and relieved him, and he had been permitted to depart. On the way back to Lakonia, though, his mind had whirled and whirled, like a turbine under power, and now he had to report his thoughts.

He recited, tonelessly, for about ten minutes into the proper phone, summing up all his views concerning that notion of Turpin's—that the site might have been inactivated by an agent of some rival corporation caring more about profits than national security, or perhaps by Navy, who had of course had their noses out of joint for more than a decade. It was entirely too possible that Turpin was right; at least, nothing on his record, or that of any other EG board-member, indicated that there would be likelier suspects within the corporation.

However, he dutifully listed the various doubts he was entertaining.

That done, he switched his attention to other matters. What additional data might be relevant? To punch for records of shoe-sales that might have included the agent of that footprint,

so sharp and clear on the roadway leading into the site—no, that was absurd. They sold millions of pairs of shoes every month, and as he'd told Turpin, the brand-name was one of the commonest. (*Shit! A "clue" in classic form, and here I am helpless, staring at it in my memory!*)

On the other hand, if someone had come to and gone away from the site on the morning in question . . . He put his chin in his hand and stared at nothing. Well, there was so much traffic on the superways nowadays, a thorough sifting of every vehicle that passed within a few miles of any of the three thousand reserved areas would take even computers a very long time . . . and that was assuming there were records to analyse.

Suppose, though, a patrolman had filed some sort of trivial report, during the period immediately following the shut-down of the site? The auto-logs had stopped registering at about oh-three-fifty; dawn had been—uh—between four and five . . .

He reached for the remote keyboard that connected him with the master forensic computer at his HQ, and punched into it an inquiry that seemed like a fair compromise: had any patrolman in the vicinity reported anything, no matter how minor, during the appropriate period, which didn't appear in any of the regular traffic-offence categories? He wasn't certain quite what he was looking for, but—well, surely a saboteur must have come to the site, spent a short while in and around it, and then gone away. Something as simple as a car reported travelling in one direction, then in the opposite direction sooner than could be accounted for by a stopover and turn-

around at a nearby city: that would fit.

Sifting police records was inevitably slow, even for computers; so many matters nowadays were police business. Waiting, he decided he could legitimately take care of a personal problem which had been irking him since his return home. What about Fenella? What had she been up to?

Should have remained a bachelor . . .

But he hadn't, and since he had a wife, she must be like Caesar's, above reproach. It was not strictly permissible to adapt officially-issued detection gear for purposes like suspected infidelity, but of course all the married executives in the Security Force did so, and the top brass turned a blind eye. He himself had Fenella so thoroughly bugged, she literally couldn't go to the bathroom—let alone make a phone-call or take a cab-ride^{at} without his being able to find out afterwards.

It took him less than three minutes to locate, on the tapes, the argument she had had with the phone company to try and get them to release the unlisted number of Magda Hansen.

XXI

“THERE ARE TWO WAYS you can go,” Magda said suddenly, after a long period of near-silence during which the night-black ribbon of the superway had unreeled like a tape punctuated with blasts of random noise, the glare of oncoming lights at the curves where suddenly they shone direct—for a mere fraction of a second—on Sheklov's tortured retinae.

“What?” He glanced at her in surprise, thinking she must be giving him

advice for their route back to Cowville. But there was no intersection sign ahead, and the last instructions he had read from the roadside had informed him it was twenty-three miles to the next exit.

“Two ways you can go,” Magda repeated. “Into yourself—or out of the world that other people share. Apart from that, you can't go anywhere and still be a person.”

Sheklov pondered that. He was driving, and terribly aware that he probably was not doing it very well. He had had a ready-made excuse for that—when Lora had suggested it, and Magda had deferred, on their departure from the restaurant where they had eaten dinner and drunk a lot of wine and beer, he had produced the data incorporated in his briefing, which explained that like many Canadians he had never owned an American car, but had stuck to Swedish and Italian imports.

Still, this thing of Lora's seemed to be designed for people who didn't drive well, and certainly the roads were. . . .

He rapidly reviewed everything which had happened or been talked about since they left Cowville on the outward leg of their trip. They had had to go a long way—north, of course—before finding a place where they would serve a mixed party with less than forced tolerance. One restaurant-owner had even offered the classic excuse: “It's not that I object, mind you, only that my other customers. . . !”

Goodbye!

And then it had proved to be very pleasant, although the meal was incredibly expensive and the continuous music grated on Sheklov's ears and the

high voices of other diners uttering demonstrably false statements had made him now and then want to get up and beat a little common sense into their heads. Still, that wasn't his brief. He had to act as though he were what he pretended to be. Turpin's comment about being shot to death by an Army firing-squad rang continually in his brain.

So there had been no awkwardnesses until they were getting back in the car, and Lora had said outright that she intended to ride in back with Danty and not drive home. And held out the car-key for Sheklov to take.

Following which, on the dark road, occasional gasps and mutters had punctuated the music from the radio, and once, perfectly clearly, "Danty, you're *terrific*!"

It was reaching down through Sheklov's mental armour, and hitting in the—well, the hormones, you might say. He had entertained the notion that when they arrived back in Cowville Magda might. . . .

I don't understand! I simply don't! Culture shock!

How on Earth (he consciously capitalised it) could this sort of promiscuous, casual behaviour co-exist with all the billboards he kept seeing that advertised Koenig's? That brand-name, and its implications, had been explained to him in detail: lead-impregnated, Koenig's underwear was claimed to protect the gonads from accidental irradiation, and styles were offered for women as well as men.

While the cars that whizzed past—he had proof of this at his back—were marketed with rear seats that folded down to facilitate seduction!

It dawned on him, perhaps as much

as two miles later at the speed they were travelling, that Magda was offering the explanation he yearned for . . . and then he recalled that she had claimed to possess more empathy than most people, to the extent of having a talent someone in trouble could call on her to exercise.

Me too?

It made him abruptly cold to think of what she might have—not guessed, *deduced* about him. His briefing had never taken a person like her into account.

Yet he had learned to trust some of his own instinctual reactions, too, and nothing about Magda—Danty was a different matter—had made his nape prickle, his usual warning-sign. There was no hint of menace about her, just a curiosity which he found almost refreshing, as though she put the most personal possible questions without a thought of giving offence.

He said, framing his words carefully, "I guess you must have noticed how hard this country has hit me. I mean, when I took on this job of mine, fixing that pulp-contract which brought me down here, I walked into it thinking what I guess most people think north of the border: 'They're right next door, so they're probably no more different than those people down the street!' If you—uh—follow me."

"Well, Danty and Lora aren't a hundred per cent typical," Magda murmured, taking a cigarette from the dispenser on the dash. The EMPTY light came on as she removed it; as though by reflex, she felt for her own pack and slipped a couple into the store to compensate. The light went out. There was almost nothing on the dash that related to the operation of the

car—the speedometer and the ignition-on light were almost buried among the ancillaries, the radiation-counter, the rain-detector light, the controls for the radio, and the air-conditioning instruments.

Clearly from the back: “Oh, Danny-y . . . !”

“You don’t get it,” Magda said, having drawn and let go the first puff of her cigarette.

“Frankly, no,” Sheklov grunted, and twisted the wheel the few degrees necessary to carry them through a wide curve.

“It’s like I was saying,” Magda answered with a shrug. “When things become intolerable, the obvious way is out. In our case, you can’t go out—not unless you’re prepared never to come back. And Lora wasn’t joking when she talked about the risk of being shot at the border. Except that treading on a mine is probably a bigger risk, and then of course the—uh—the private enterprise bit is unpredictable.”

“The what?”

“Private enterprise. Lots of privately financed organisations patrol the borders, too. And mine them. Security doesn’t approve, and sometimes they get hauled into court on the grounds that if they don’t trust the official patrols they can’t be loyal. But usually they’re let off with a nominal fine and a warning, because patriotism with a capital P is the excuse for anything.”

“I—I don’t believe I ever heard about that,” Sheklov admitted, wondering when the border in his mind was going to be crossed, the one between Sheklov and Holtzer, who was fading moment by moment as he struggled with the problem that had troubled him since his arrival . . .

I’m on a fool’s errand here! It’s as though they’d sent me to an asylum three thousand miles wide! An idea which is brand-new could be new because it’s insane, couldn’t it?

Suppose I’d walked into one of the “private enterprise” patrols when I came ashore?

Hell! Maybe I did!

“Getting tired? Like me to spell you?” Magda said. He realised with a wrenching sense of panic that he had let his attention drift from the wheel, and crossed into another lane already crammed with cars.

“Uh—no,” he forced out. “No, I’m fine.”

Providentially, in the lane just vacated, a car howled past with its governor cut out, doing far more than the legal maximum, and he was able to jerk his head at it.

“Saw him coming up—thought I’d better move over.”

“Ah—yes,” Magda said, and took another drag on her cigarette. A few heartbeats later, she continued with what she had been saying as though there had been no distraction.

“Yes! There are two ways to go, assuming you want to go somewhere and aren’t just content to be forced into the official mould. You can go insane, and that’s the easy one. You can buy Koenig’s, and keep a gun on the dash”—there was one in this car and she tapped it with long sharp nails—“and convince yourself you’re taking the ordinary, reasonable precautions a human being has to take to protect himself. That’s what I meant when I said you can go out of the world other people share.”

But surely,” Sheklov hazarded, “other people do share that world.”

"You miss my point. They share the idea that the world mustn't be shared. Tap a friend on the shoulder when you meet him on the street, he whirls around and pulls a gun, doesn't he? Likely a gas-gun, that only blinds and doesn't kill, but a gun nonetheless. And he fires before he looks to see whether you're known to him."

"Yes," Sheklov said at length, a mile of dark road later. "I'm with you."

"It's a whole pattern," Magda said. "And it's crazy. Like with warts on. You know—you ever hear—of any sane species whose worst natural enemy was himself?"

"Man?"

"*Natural species?*"

Silence except for the humming sound of traffic all around them. Signs were beginning to say COWVILLE up ahead.

"Yes, I guess we tried to defy nature at some stage," Sheklov said at last. "One gets to see the results in the timber-trade, naturally—" He caught himself as Magda gave a dry laugh and echoed his last word in a whisper: *naturally!*

"So what's the other way?" he asked, irritated.

"Hold it," Magda said, twisting round in her seat. "Hey! Close out, you two!"

In the back seat, a mutter of annoyance. Sheklov spared a glance in his mirror and saw the two heads, one fair and one dark, separate and move to a regular sitting position.

"What's the trouble?"

"Pigs, what else?" Magda said, and leaned away from him. A car with a spotlight on the corner of the windshield was working its way up the line of traffic, and the man next to the

driver was flashing the light into the windows of the cars it passed.

When they came up to Lora's car, they found her and Danty decorously sitting, more or less fully clothed, in opposite corners of the rear seat.

"The other way?" Magda said when they had been overtaken in due sequence. "Find a route where the bastards can't follow you and shine spotlights on you, of course."

"There isn't one," Lora said in a dead voice.

The turnout signs were saying COWVILLE—NORTH. Sheklov remembered that from their entry on to the superway. He slowed and signalled right.

"You're not with me," Magda said. "I mean the route where the things that count in your life aren't the things they're worried about—even though they ought to be afraid of them, because they're the most dangerous. Danty, are you okay?"

He was rubbing his temple with the hand of his uninjured arm.

"My head hurts," he said in a dull tone.

"Oh, Danty!" Lora burst out. "It must be that cut! Don, get us off the superway quick as you can, find a drugstore!"

"No!" Magda snapped. "Zip it, will you? Danty?"

"I . . ." He licked his lips. "I don't get it all," he said after a pause. "But the one thing we mustn't do is go home."

"But—!" Sheklov began.

"Make for it, sure," Danty said. Little beads of sweat, shiny in the lights of the city, were springing out on his skin. "But don't try and stop outside, that clear? Something's happening,

something bad. We got to smell the scene and find out what.”

Sheklov gave Magda a blank stare. She sat back with a resigned expression.

“Told you,” she said. “Danty was born at the wrong end of time, peg? So you do what he tells you. If you don’t—shit, the sky may fall on us.”

XXII

IT WAS A LONG TIME before Morton Clarke could believe the impersonal report of the computers, so far away from this familiar desk of his, yet—electronically speaking—so close at hand that he could reach out and touch them.

They had a kind of reality to them which people never seemed to have.

He looked again at the print-outs, dangling over the automatic destruction unit, and eventually picked them up and laid them side by side, because he had to convince himself.

“The name’s the same,” he said with an access of gallows humour, and did what had to be done.

Then he waited. He didn’t wonder what Fenella was doing. He knew she was watching TV.

Channel 8.

The first thing the security forces did *not* do was notify the police that they were about to conduct a raid. It wasn’t safe to do that; the police were not secure, but jealously guarded their right to pick their own men and women, to hide their confidential files . . . or to try to.

So it had been years since the US Security Force liaised with the police anywhere, and above all not in Lakonia

or Cowville, the most sensitive of all areas in the country.

Cold, despite the outside warmth of the night, Clarke sat at his desk and dictated what must be looked out for.

“Apartment empty,” was the first news that reached him. He gave a nod. That figured.

Then, a few minutes later: “Looks like a foster-reb pad. Mystical books. Diagrams. Ouija board, that kind of thing. Man’s and woman’s clothes in the closets.”

“Names?” was Clarke’s only counter.

“Danty Aloysius Ward, male. Magda Hansen, née Porter . . . Say, Mr. Clarke!”

“Yes?”

“What the hell are we looking for? I been in hundreds of places like this one”—a vibrating, hammering sound, the overheard passage of a hovercar—“though maybe not all quite so noisy! Bad place to plant bugs, this!”

Maybe that’s why they’re there. “Did you check the phone?”

“Sure we did. It’s unlisted, but the number corresponds.”

“Ah-hah. Then tell me what size shoes they take, will you?”

“I guess it’s Charlie who’s checking out the clothes. I’ll get him; just a moment!”

Waiting, Clarke looked again at the tape he had—well, put it politely, don’t say *extracted*, say—*obtained* from the police computers.

SOURCE: LOGGED BY CLOUGH WILLIAM N., PATROLMAN #7653. LOCATION: GASTATION 132 SUPERWAY ZONE H-8. TIMED AT:—

“Mr. Clarke?”

Yes.”

"I have those shoe-sizes for you. Brand-names too, where I can read them. Most of them are pretty worn."

"Shoot, then." Poising pen over paper.

When he had the details before him, Clarke felt his mind congealing like fresh concrete, into new hardness, new heaviness. He was barely aware of his own voice saying, "It fits. Keep at it. Turn the apartment inside out. This one is *big*."

After which he stared at the news-cutting framed on the wall and did nothing for nearly five minutes.

"Where's Sophie?" Mrs. Gleewood demanded in the middle of a sentence uttered by the TV which she and her son-in-law were watching.

"What?" Bemused, as usual, into a semi-stupor by the polychrome images on the screen, Turpin started up in his chair. "Oh! Sophie! Well . . . Well, I guess she went to lie down, didn't she?"

"You mean she's drunk again," Mrs. Gleewood snapped. "I noticed at dinner—don't think you can hide that sort of thing from me! I never thought when she married you she'd be driven to alcoholism, I swear I didn't!"

She folded her bony hands and jutted her sharp chin forward. She dieted, of course, to "keep her figure", apparently in the hope that young men would continue to find her attractive in spite of her narrow, cruel eyes with those dirty-looking dark bags under them, the chicken-skin scrawniness of her throat—which should have sported about three comfortable double chins, but instead sagged in loose pore-dotted folds—and the rasping, whining note that never left her voice. If there were any single conceivable reason to bad-

mouth anyone fool enough to wander within earshot of this woman, Turpin had sometimes thought, it was beyond her powers of self-control to deny herself the pleasure of mentioning it.

Why couldn't the stupid old bag eat a normal diet, get comfortably fat and die young and happy—instead of hanging on until doomsday, griping about everyone and everything? Maybe she'd have kept one of her three husbands if she had!

But all he said aloud was, "Come now, mother-in-law, you can't say that Sophie is an alcoholic! She does drink more than most people, I imagine, but she's always been highly-strung."

Mrs. Gleewood sniffed. "And where's your guest?" she snapped. "That Mr. Donald Holtzer, or whatever his name is?"

"I believe he—uh—he went out with Lora," Turpin said, and tensed, his hackles bristling.

"I see," Mrs. Gleewood said. "I see! Another scalp, hm?"

"What do you mean?" Bridling—knowing he was expected to, because if he didn't that would ruin her evening. But it was getting harder and harder to fill his designated role.

"Scalps," Mrs. Gleewood said with satisfied deliberateness. "*Pubic* scalps. Not yet nineteen, I would remind you, and already she has enough of those to qualify her for a full Indian brave's head-dress. And, while I'm considering the subject of the children you inflicted on my daughter, may I ask what you're going to do about Peter's haemorrhoids?"

Christ! How I'd love to take that scrawny neck and wring it! And I could, I could, I keep myself in good shape, and if I just—

He caught himself, barely in time.

Oh, that reeky turd Sheklov! If he weren't here, if I hadn't been compelled to cushion him, I could have rid myself for good of this loathesome, disgusting, incompetent would-be matriarch! As soon as I'm shut of him, I'll—I'll . . .

Only he wouldn't. He knew he wouldn't. It would be as hard as curing himself of a habit like smoking or drinking.

He said mildly, "I'm afraid I don't quite understand."

Conscious of having won the exchange, Mrs. Gleewood sniffed. "I wish you wouldn't talk while I'm trying to watch TV!" she crowed.

And sat back, delighted with the dialogue.

Meantime, Turpin had something else on his mind. It was—in a paradoxical sense—unreal, because it had been real to him for so long.

Am I going to be exposed?

The afternoon, and early evening until he managed to get away, which he had spent around the reserved area, had already taken on the dimensions of a dream. Because all the time and under no matter what circumstances he had grown used to behaving exactly as someone in his position was expected to, he had obviously to limit his responses to those that a genuinely loyal and committed executive of Energetics General might convincingly display when faced by a crisis of the current magnitude.

In other words, he had to act as though—whatever he might have said, for instance to Clarke—concerning the factually known political situation within the country, and hence acknowledging the jealousy between

Army and Navy, the constant jockeying for position which never ceased between the various major corporations, always hunting for a larger slice of the Defence Department cake, he had all the right incontrovertible assumptions. Navy would never act against the country's best interests! Corporation X, since it draws down DoD funds, must be staffed by the most loyal of directors! The Security Force, being hand-picked is unquestionably the court of last resort, and we can safely rely on them to clear up this mess. Of course, one has to be on guard all the time because, as was shown in South-East Asia, Latin America, the Philippines, and God knows where else, the other side is subtle, devious, cunning! But far be it from *me* to lose confidence in the wisdom of those who have laid down the precepts by which we live, the experts whose love of freedom has defined the degree to which we, the laymen, and our families, must sacrifice liberty to preserve it.

But at the edge of his awareness, even though he was sure he was acting exactly as he ought to in his position, he could hear what Sheklov had said—about there being alien intelligences who could and conceivably would wipe out modern civilisation. Each time he reviewed his recollection of that incredible statement, it acquired new overtones, new resonances due to his subconscious, new implications pregnant with terror.

And here I am being polite to a stupid old woman because I have to maintain my cover. Am I crazy?

The conviction began to grow in his mind.

Yes. Absolutely crazy.

He looked now and then out of the

corner of his eye at the smugly self-satisfied Mrs Gleewood, as though he were an executioner measuring someone in advance for a garrotte.

It fitted. It all hung together. Morton Clarke didn't want to have to believe it, but in the end . . .

He looked, one final time, at the chart he had drawn on his notepad, linked with arrows: FENELLA CLARKE to MAGDA HANSEN to DANTY WARD to LORA TURPIN to LEWIS TURPIN to—

No, it had to stop there. It mustn't go on! Mustn't! Because somewhere along the line, maybe three stops from now, the chain of reasoning would close, and the name would be his own: MORTON CLARKE.

It had to be broken before it was allowed to extend that far. No one could accuse him of treason.

Slowly, like a martyr hearing the call for his turn at the Colosseum, he rose from his chair and felt inside his jacket for his gun. Government issue. Got to be proved worthy of it. Immediately, before anyone else saw the connections he had just worked out.

He went into the adjacent room, where Fenella was watching Channel 8—no, correction, Channel 9, must have changed over when the commercials came on . . .

"Hi, Mort honey," she said. "Come sit down! What you been doing all this time?"

"Traitor," he said.

"What?"

"Traitor! Fucking traitor! Fucking commie!"

Bang. Bang. Bang-bang-bang-bang.

The gun was empty. Government issue. Six official shells expended.

Have to account for them. One should have been enough if he'd come close enough to make it tell.

How to explain to the authorities those five wasted shots?

He sat down beside the chair which her blood was soaking and began to cry, quite unable to think of an excuse.

XXIII

WHAT IN HELL have I wandered into?

Sheklov's mind rang with that question. But he had no choice about complying, short of seizing the dashboard gun and holding it to Magda's side.

At the same time, however, a curious exaltation filled him. Suppose—just suppose—that by pure chance he had already stumbled on what he had been looking for: that "different attitude of mind" which Bratcheslavsky had been so insistent about. . . .

Where the behaviour of Danty and Magda had relevance to that alien ship sparkling against the stars, he could not guess. Nonetheless, he was willing for the time being to yield to whatever he was told, although he was simultaneously worried about what would happen to his cover as a Canadian if Security's attention was drawn to him.

Hunched forward on the rear seat, speaking almost in Sheklov's ear, Danty said, "No, not this turn—go two more blocks, then make a right. Then we'll come down our street on the side further from the apartment, and we'll get a clearer sight of what's happening."

"What do you *think* is happening?" countered Sheklov in his best Holtzer manner. "I can't see any point to this—"

"Nonsense?" Magda interrupted. "Don, I've known Danty a long, long

time. Like I told you, he was born at the wrong end of time. He can feel things that haven't happened yet."

"So why didn't he dodge the guy with the knife?" Sheklov retorted.

There was a short silence. Magda turned around in her seat and looked at Danty.

Finally Danty said, "Because if I hadn't been where they caught up with me, I wouldn't have found out something very important."

"Danty, what *are* you talking about?" Lora demanded..

Almost in the same moment, Magda said, "Danty, are you—?"

"Sure I'm sure!" he snapped. "It's been getting stronger for several minutes now. I've never had it so strong in my life. Right here, Don, and right again. Around the corner, take it as slow as you can."

Lora said after a short pause, "I keep some binocs in the glove compartment—do you want them?"

"Yeah!" Danty sat up straight. "Mag', pass them to me!"

She pulled open the glove compartment and found them, a cheap Mexican pair in a plastic ever-ready case. He took them and held them ready as Sheklov made the final turn into their home street. At once he let out a hissing breath.

"Look!" he rapped, and set the glasses to his eyes.

Glancing rapidly from the traffic around to the landing, up close to the hoverhalt, from which access to Magda's home was obtained, Sheklov felt a pang of horror. The door was wide open. The window was lighted. Two men were standing guard, suspiciously eyeing passengers descending from a recently-arrived hovercar, and

apparently giving off some sort of repellent aura, because these passengers were keeping their distance.

Also—and this gave him an excuse to drive very slowly—two large cars were illegally parked against the kerb instead of in parking-bays.

"Pigs?" Lora said, her voice quavering.

"Not pigs," Danty said, staring through the glasses. "Security Force. Mag', I'm afraid you've lost your home."

"What do you mean?" Sheklov snapped. "I don't know what those security men—if they *are* security men—I don't know what they're doing in your apartment, but surely you don't mean that!"

"Don't mean it?" Danty repeated, lowering the binocs now that they had passed the building and it was impossible to see the landing where the men stood guard. "Tell him, Mag' baby."

She was sitting very still, face white, eyes staring straight ahead. But her hands were folded over so that her nails were deep in her palms.

"He's right," she said in a dead voice. "Pigs you can take. Once the sexies hit you, you're done for."

"Sexies?" Sheklov echoed, and caught himself, realising that the term stood for "Security excess."

"But this is crazy!" Lora burst out. "Hell! You can't just cave in! What about—?" With a snap of her fingers. "Hey! My father! He has lots of pull! He'll get 'em off your backs. Just let me get to a phone and tell him what's to be done."

She was so agitated, she was reaching for the door-handle.

But Danty had completely ignored

the interruption. He was looking solely at Magda.

"Well?" he said. "I'm sorry, you know—more sorry than I can say. Not that that does any good."

"No." Magda stirred, as though from a period of deep meditation, and helped herself to another cigarette. "No, it doesn't do any good. All right, the avalanche has begun. I guess I half-expected it. You're in charge."

The door-bell sounded. Turpin, glad of the interruption, rose from his chair with alacrity.

"Sit down!" Mrs. Gleewood rasped. "You don't have to answer the door! What do you keep Estelle for?"

"It's Estelle's evening off," Turpin said with satisfaction. "Sunday, remember? Also Peter is out, Lora is out, and Sophie is drunk. You said so yourself. So unless you propose to go and answer—?"

She glowered at him and then stared firmly at the TV again.

He went to the panel by the door of the living-room where the intercom was, and pressed the answer button to activate the mike.

"Yes, who is it?"

"Is that Mr. Turpin personally?" a cold strange voice inquired.

"Ah—yes!" Butterflies began to perform in Turpin's belly.

"My name is Thorpe, Eric Thorpe. Security force. May I see you for a moment?"

Oh, Christ . . .

But habit made him impervious, on the surface, to even shocks like that one. He said, "Surely!" In a tone as cheerful as though he really were pleased to be distracted from the com-

pany of his mother-in-law. "I'll be with you in just a second."

Crossing the hall, ignoring the call Mrs. Gleewood hurled after him—wanting to be told who the visitor was—he reviewed a hundred possibilities in ten seconds, and found that he liked none of them. Pray that his hints to Clarke, out at the reserved area, had borne fruit . . .

"I'd like to see your redbook, if you don't—" he began, but Thorpe had anticipated the request and was already holding it up so it could be read through the narrow gap. Yes, he was who he said he was, and moreover he held the rank of substantive warden.

"Come in," Turpin muttered. "We'll use my den—it's bug-free."

He led the way; offered a drink—refused—and a cigarette, which was accepted. Sat down, and to his dismay found he had to put his hands together to stop them shaking.

"Well, what can I do for you?" he said. His voice at least sounded under control. "I guess it's about this affair at the reserved area, hm?"

"Indirectly." Thorpe was a pale man, with deep-set eyes surrounded by dark rings, as though he lived on far too little sleep and had done for years. Like all SF executives, he wore unremarkable and inexpensive clothes: tonight, in dark green. "I believe you talked for some while with one of my brother officers, didn't you?"

"Morton Clarke?"

"Yes."

"Well, I imagine we must have talked, on and off, over a period of—let's see—three hours. Why?"

About . . . ?"

"Well, the alarming discovery that had been made," Turpin said. "And

the implications. Wasn't that obvious?"

Thorpe looked down at his involuntary host's hands, as though scrutinising them for signs of anxiety. He said, in a matter-of-fact tone, "Of course. And I believe you are slightly acquainted with a young black named Danty Ward?"

What the hell is this leading up to?

Turpin said as levelly as he could, "Acquainted would be an exaggeration. I met him last night, because my daughter invited him to our party, and one can hardly refuse his own daughter's guests admission. Why? Has he done something?"

Thorpe ignored that question. He continued, "How long has your daughter known this—uh—person?"

"I've no idea," Turpin snapped.

"Are you also acquainted with a woman going by the name of Mrs. Magda Hansen?"

"Not that I can recall," Turpin said, blinking.

"Do you know a Mrs. Avice Donnelly?"

"You mean Fred Donnelly's wife—our plant security chief? Well, naturally I do! But only slightly. Look!" He sat forward. "Will you tell me what this is about?"

Thorpe raised his eyes and met Turpin's and locked with them.

"Sabotage. Subversion. Murder. Treason. That's what it's about, Mr. Turpin. It would appear that Morton Clarke has been given what we presume to be a post-hypnotic order to kill his wife, and has done so."

What?

"Yes, I'm afraid that's apparently the case." Like a good security man, Thorpe always qualified assertions of

that order. "Have you any idea where your daughter is?"

"I—uh—no!" Turpin felt sweat breaking out all over his body.

"Or Danty Ward?"

"Hell, of course not!"

"I see." Thorpe cogitated a moment, and then rose. "Well, I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to come with me, Mr. Turpin. To avoid the possibility of embarrassing you, of course, I came alone, but I should point out that everything we say can be overheard by colleagues of mine waiting in a car below, and I would counsel you not to decline, or it will become essential to escort you away under guard. Shall we go?"

"Night-riding," Danty said suddenly. "Head north. Don't stop at the first or second gas-station we pass, but call at the one by the superway entrance on Sixtieth. Fill up there."

"Now just a second!" Sheklov exploded.

"Don't argue," Magda said. "Do as you're told." And, with a movement as quick as a striking snake, she snatched the dashboard gun from its socket and flipped off the safety-catch, levelling it at Sheklov.

"Oh, shit, Magda!" Danty exclaimed. "No need for that! Put it down, will you?"

"But—"

In the rear-view mirror Sheklov caught a glimpse of Lora, face perfectly white, knuckles pressed to her teeth as though to suppress a scream. He felt pretty much like screaming himself.

"No buts!" Danty said angrily. "I mean, Don here wouldn't want it to be known that he's Russian, would he?"

Say! What's your real name, by the way! Ivan? Yuri? Nikita?"

XXIV

THERE WAS A BRIEF terrible instant during which Sheklov found himself insanely wishing that he believed in a personal god who could be trusted to provide on-the-spot salvation for his worshippers.

How long has he known? And, worse yet:

Who has he told?

He continued to go through the right motions and drive the car, mechanically, like a robot: red light, slow down; green, step on the gas; miss that idiot pulling out from that parking-bay without looking . . . But that had nothing to do with his conscious mind. It was all automatic.

"I think you're out of your skull!" he husked at last. "I'm going to find a parking-bay and get out, and leave you to your—your mad fantasies!"

"*Russian?*" Lora said, as though the word had been in her throat for a short eternity, building up pressure until now it came blasting out like the plug of semi-solid magma which chokes the crater of a volcano until it erupts.

"Yes, of course!" Danty snapped. "Either that, or perhaps Polish, Hungarian, Czech—no, my guess is Russian. Well, Don?"

"You're insane! You're hallucinating or something!" But Sheklov's mouth was so dry, he could barely speak.

"Maybe you were right after all, Mag'," Danty sighed, "Okay, put the gun back on him, but keep it well out of sight. He missed death by inches at

least once already in the past few days, when he came ashore. And that would have spread him kind of thin and all over everywhere, so—"

"Look out!" Magda exclaimed, and seized the wheel just in time, twisting it to the left and then straightening out. Lora let go a cry of alarm. Sheklov had nearly crashed into the back of a truck.

"That got to him," Danty said softly. "Don, baby, didn't you know the site was turned off when you came ashore? Didn't you know that if it hadn't been the submarine would have been blasted less than a mile away? They weren't so careful when they left as when they approached."

"You just figured that out?" Magda said, and in the same breath added, "Pull over, Don. You're not in a fit state to drive. You're shaking so much. I'll take the wheel as soon as you can put us in a parking-bay—ah, there's one now."

Dumb, Sheklov nosed the car into it.

"Well, it's how it had to be," Danty said. "I felt something *bad* on the way. And I can't think of any other disaster that fits the picture—No, Don! Don't get out! Slide towards Magda and let her climb over you!"

Sheklov, numb, withdrew his hand from the door-handle and obeyed.

As Magda took the controls: "So that's the way I see it. If the site hadn't been turned off, the sub would have registered on the detectors, and—pow."

"But he's been staying right in our apartment!" Lora cried. She was having to clamp her jaw to stop her teeth chattering. "A Russian! A spy!"

"You recommended the gas-station on Sixtieth, didn't you?" Magda said, glancing at the dash. "Oh, shit! Lora! Lora! Stop your snivelling and tell me which of these damned dials is the gas-gauge!"

"Uh . . ." Wiping her eyes on her sleeve. "Doesn't have a dial. It's sonic."

"Just say to fill up the tank," Danty snapped. "Night-riders usually do."

"Yeah." Magda slowed to make the turn on to Sixtieth, a right. "But why the hell did you leave the site turned off?"

"I guess . . ." Danty swallowed hard. "I guess so that this would happen. So that we'd be here, now, in this mess."

"Gas-station!" Magda said unnecessarily; it was blazing with light and huge mobile advertising figures, spotlighted, filled with helium, and tugged into a weird non-stop parody of a dance by fine wires attached to cams on electric motors, signalled drivers to pull in. "Don, you hold your tongue, and behave yourself, hm? And you, Lora!"

"No! Let me out!" Lora cried, and as the car swung close to the side of the road, in order to enter the gas-station, tried to snatch at the door-handle.

Danty stopped her, his dark hand closing over her mouth and his full strength forcing her back against the seat.

"I may only have one hand right now," he said in a voice as cold as a Siberian winter, "but if I have to I'll strangle you. Is that understood?"

For a moment Sheklov thought she was going to fight back; her fists curled over and her eyes widened in a look of fury. Then, abruptly, she yielded, and went limp. When he took his hand away, she stared at Danty with a kind

of adoration, as though this were the first time in her life that someone had given her an order meant to be obeyed—and she liked the novel sensation.

"Full, please!" Magda called as they drew up to the pumps.

"Full it is!" came the reply over the remote speakers.

"I . . ." Sheklov licked his lips. "I meant to ask someone: why do you lay your gas-stations out this way, with the attendants in those high glass booths?"

"Robbery," Magda said. "Maybe the risk of sabotage, too. There was a time a few years ago, when I was in my teens, when gas-stations were closing down all over. They made such a lovely show when someone tossed a Molotov cocktail at the pumps."

Cash-drawer. Credit card. Usual routine. During it, Sheklov noticed that Danty was tensing and biting his lower lip. Then, as soon as the card came back and they were leaving the station, he spoke up.

"I just figured out how they got on to us."

"You and me, you mean?" Magda said, spotting a gap in the traffic and accelerating violently towards it. "So, how?"

"A cat called Rollins—get on the superway as soon as you can, hm?—gave me a ride back to Cowville. We stopped for gas and a suspicious pig came and checked the governor on his car. A Banshee. Thought it had been shorted out. I guess he would have filed a report. He looked at my redbook."

"Ah-hah. And the sexies got to the tape of the report, hm? Yes, that fits. So this time wherever we go, we go for good."

"I still think you're crazy—" Sheklov began, but Danty cut him short.

"Look, Ivan or whatever your real name is! Get this into your head, will you? I was there on the beach when you came ashore. I saw you get in Turpin's car—"

"What?" From Lora, a shrill-edged cry of horror.

"Yeah, you heard!" Danty snapped. "Your dad's car! I saw it again in the garage under the tower you live in. Recognised the licence number, so don't give me any shit! Like I was saying, Ivan! Do you want that lot to come out when they catch up with me and start feeding me interrogation drugs?"

Ahead, the superway access point loomed, brilliant with neon strips forming arrows and the letter N for northbound. Sheklov caught a brief glimpse of the name of some city, and a distance, but failed to read them clearly.

"You're in the laughing seat," Magda said sourly, swinging into the traffic on the superway. As ever, there was a vast horde of it; this was about the time—midnight—when the night-riders took to the road. Here and there a heavy truck lumbered along in the slow lanes, and the drivers of private cars blasted their horns to register their opinion that all trucks should be forbidden these roads.

"Huh?" Danty said. "Oh, you mean what I was saying a few hours ago, I guess. Like about getting out?"

"Yeah."

"I meant it," Danty said after a pause. "But . . . Well, tell Ivan here what happens to someone when the sexies put the knife in."

"Oh, life simply stops being worth

living," Magda said. "Even if they don't convict you of anything, the fact that you're under suspicion gets around. They have computer-to-computer links, you know"—with a glance at Sheklov beside her—"for absolutely everything you may want to do. Your credit rating goes first, and your cards are cancelled, and as you probably know carrying cash in this country is a bad idea. Has been since God knows when. Before Danty was born, certainly."

"Right," Danty agreed.

"Robbery again?" Sheklov hazarded. He was on the verge of caving in; these people took it so matter-of-factly that he was Russian, and it didn't trouble them at all—only the attention of the Security Force was on their minds.

"Not just that—I mean, not just the risk of *being* robbed," Magda said. Now, already, at the high speeds permitted on the superway, the city was dwindling and the dark shell of the night was closing them in. "More the automatic assumption that if you're carrying more than like fifty bucks—peanuts—you're the thief. Lose your credit rating, you might as well be bankrupt. After that, of course, if you have a job, they make sure your employers find out. Then your landlord; that's the usual order. If you're married, your spouse, and particularly your kids, if they're over say eight or ten years old. I had a client once who came to me because her son, who was thirteen, had heard his father was under suspicion by the sexies, and wanted her to run away with him where Dad couldn't find them, then inform on him to the pigs."

"The price of liberty is eternal vigi-

lance," Danty said, and made the quotation sound downright obscene.

"Is this—is this so literally true that you're running out on your home?" Sheklov said in a bewildered tone, no longer sure whether he was Holtzer or himself.

And our country, if we can make it," Danty said. "Like Magda just told you, once the searchlight turns on you, life stops being worth living. Mag!"

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry. Truly I am. If I'd been any better at my thing, I'd have kept you from getting involved—"

"Oh, zip it up," Magda cut in wearily. "I guess you were right when you talked to me earlier on. I don't have anything worth staying for. Hell, it's got to where if I order a book I'm interested in through the mail, a pig shows up the day after it's delivered asking why I wanted it."

"Yeah," Danty said. "And . . . Well, if it's any consolation, I feel—beyond any doubt—that this is a *right* thing to do. It leads somewhere. It does something terribly important which I can't understand. But I'm sure, I'm *convinced* it does it!"

Sheklov, listening, felt a renewal of that unaccountable exaltation which had struck him on the way into Cowville.

"Were are we going?" Lora said faintly.

"Canada," Danty said. "Put you off a hundred miles or so from here, if you like. If you promise not to set the sexes on us, or the pigs."

"Canada?" Sheklov snapped, before Lora could answer. "But it's not as simple as—"

"The grapevine tells you where you can still get across," Magda broke in.

"We know a couple of places. Dodgy, but with Danty to take care of us, we'll make it. And of course the moment you set foot on Canadian soil, they'd die rather than turn you back . . ."

"I don't want to be put out," Lora said abruptly. Danty and Sheklov looked at her hard.

"No," she emphasised. "If it's true that—that my father brought a Russian agent into. . . ?" It turned into a question, and died away. Danty nodded vigorously.

"Whatever Ivan says!" he insisted.

"Then he lied to me all my life," Lora whispered. "I don't want to see him again as long as I live. And that's not crazy talk. I'm cold sober again, and I *mean* it."

In which case . . .

Sheklov felt as though he was going over the edge of a cliff into deep, icy water. But he said, "My name isn't Ivan. It's Vassily."

XXV

LORA HUDDLED AWAY into the corner of the rear seat and could be heard faintly crying—not sobbing, simply snuffling. Headlights on the other half of the road shot towards them like tracer-bullets.

Sheklov thought: *Regarding success and failure alike. . .*

Well, at the moment he was compelled to, whether or not he had achieved detachment. Because he had absolutely no inkling which had overtaken him. Either he had failed, spectacularly and monstrously, and was going to have to kill himself and his companions in order to avoid exposure of Turpin, or else he had succeeded in some manner he did not understand.

Danty knew I was due to come ashore. He was there when I arrived, watching me. He saw Turpin's car take me away.

He had turned off the site. How did he know the way to do it safely? Turpin said he would hardly dare to try the job without a schematic.

He appeared to be claiming that he foresaw the submarine being blown up if the site were not switched off. Then he left it switched off, thereby ensuring—he said as much—that we would be here, in this mess.

The whole thing is crazy! And so am I!

Yet, behind all these surface thoughts, there was a kind of echo: recollection of what Magda had said, twice.

"Danty was born at the wrong end of time."

A joking comment! Must be! But it had a—a ring to it. An overtone. Some all-important hidden meaning. Tantalising, like having a word on the tip of your tongue and being unable to utter it.

There had been silence in the car, except for Lora's soft weeping, for many miles. It was as though his admission concerning his identity had been a minor climax in the course of events, and, it being passed, Danty was content to wait for some new pattern to develop. Magda, at the wheel, was patently too depressed to talk; she wore an expression of unspeakable sadness, revealed flick-flick-flick by the oncoming headlamps.

From all the various directions in which his mind had been scattered, Sheklov forcibly pulled himself back together. He reviewed what had to be said; having organised it, he spoke.

"Danty!"

"Yes?"

"I probably don't need to tell you that this—this talent of yours has completely blown my mind. I don't believe it, but I've been driven to accept it."

"That figures," Danty said dryly, and added: "*Vassily!* By the way, what kind of a name is that? Is it Russian?"

"Yes. Though it was Greek originally. Funny, you know!" Sheklov gave a short harsh laugh. "It means 'king'. Not the ideal name for a good third-generation Party man."

But you're not one," Danty said.

"I—" Sheklov began, and broke off. After a moment, he admitted, "No, in some ways I guess not."

"You're too independent," Danty said with assurance. "Like Magda, or me, come to that. You can quote the *Gita*, for example, as though you took it seriously. My guess would be you have it by heart."

"When you wormed that out of me, I almost had a heart-attack," Sheklov said. *Was it only last night? It feels like a year ago!* But that was a good illusion to be under. It lent the comforting impression of distance in time to his borderline panic. He didn't want to be reminded right now that he was capable of panic. He had to keep his mind at its finest pitch, to reason out and plan this ridiculous journey they were committed to.

"Yes, I'm sorry about that," Danty muttered. "But . . . Well, this talent of mine! I'll try and explain how it works, as far as I understand it myself—which isn't very well." He hunched forward and rested his unhurt arm on the back of Sheklov's seat, staring past him at the cars on the superway.

"Since I was—oh—sixteen, seventeen, I guess, now and then I've felt a funny pressure at the back of my head, a sensation that belongs in the same group with hunger and thirst, because it means I have to do something to satisfy it. It makes me grope around like a blind man, or sometimes just wander from one place to another until I feel the pressure fading a little and I realise I'm on the right track. Now and then I can tell quite clearly that I have to be at some special place at some special time. Like the morning of your arrival. I knew a direction I had to go in, I knew I'd recognise the spot when I reached it."

"And you knew how to shut down the site," Sheklov said, marvelling.

"That was the same process," Danty said. "I got through the fences around the site by—by picturing an action in my mind and waiting to find out whether the pressure in my head got better or worse. Then I did the same thing with the lock on the control bunker, and then with the switches. I was asking this talent of mine, 'Is it safe to close this one? Is it safe to close that one?' And all the time I knew I had to get this right, because otherwise there was going to be a great crashing disaster. Like I told you, I figured out later that the sub which put you ashore would have triggered the detectors."

"Thank you," Sheklov said soberly. "I wouldn't have cared to be a mile from the explosion of one of those missiles."

"Nor would I," Danty said, with his regular crooked smile. "And then there's one other thing about my talent. I can sense, in the same general way, how to—to inveigle people into doing things they didn't intend to. I can sort

of time words which prompt them to react."

"Like making me quote the *Gita*."

"Right. I can't pull the trick all the time, only when something has built up the pressure in my head to a particular pitch. When I'm sensing something terribly important." Danty passed his hand across his eyes. "And I never felt anything a fraction as important as—as you."

"How do you feel about me, then?" Sheklov countered.

"It's hard to describe. Say huge. Say vast. Say colossal. You still aren't within miles of hitting the idea. It's like looking up into the sky and thinking yourself into a state where you can actually understand a million light-years. Feeling in your guts a gulf that takes light all that time to crawl across. Something that makes the whole of history, the whole story of life on Earth, the age of the Earth itself, *tiny*!"

A shiver trembled down Sheklov's spine. He began to dare to think that he might, just *might*, have succeeded in his mission. He still didn't see how, but the possibility was now credible.

Magda, unexpectedly, spoke up. She said, "Danty, what point of the border should we make for?"

"I'm still not quite clear on that," Danty said. "Keep heading north, that's all. I should be able to tell you in a little while what the safest zone would be."

"Are we going to keep driving through the day, or lie up somewhere, or what?"

"Now that's odd," Danty said, biting his lip. "I was thinking we ought to worry about this car, because obviously the licence number can be recognised, and you'd expect that if Lora doesn't

show at home it'll be reported. But I have this absolute conviction that we're safe if we go on driving. I have this crazy idea that even if the car has been—oh—reported stolen, say, it's not going to be taken seriously." He hesitated. "And I can only think of one explanation for that."

"What?" Magda demanded.

"Well . . ." Danty licked his lips. "I think because the person who would report it is Turpin, and he's in trouble."

He glanced reflexively at Lora, in case she had heard. But she was asleep.

Sheklov thought: *Bad trouble? Because it would be a catastrophe for the whole world if he were caught.*

"Is Turpin one of yours?" Magda asked, with a sidelong glance at Sheklov. When he didn't answer, she answered for herself. "I guess he must be, since he collected you from the submarine."

"What's the use of denying it?" Sheklov said wearily. "Yes, he is. And he's one of the greatest heroes in history and he's never going to get credit for it."

"He will one day," Danty said.

"What?"

"I know what you mean," Danty murmured. "I've often wondered how the world had stayed in one piece, and I just saw a good reason. He told you about all the missiles, the radar, and that kind of stuff—right?"

"Yes."

"Thank God somebody did," Danty said, and Magda nodded.

Are these people never going to stop amazing me? Sheklov thought. He said curiously, "Tell me something, will you? How do you feel about—about me?"

"As a Russian agent?" Danty suggested, and on Sheklov's hesitant nod gave a shrug. "Oh, as a brave man, I guess. Dedicated. You'd have to be. And clever. But if you mean as a—foreigner, a communist, all the other things, then . . ."

"Lucky," Magda said.

"I don't get that," Sheklov said. "How, lucky?"

"Well, because you still have somewhere to go," Magda said. "That's as near as I can define what I mean. Look at us here in this country. We're in the same sort of mess as the Romans were once, and the Spanish, and God knows who else. We've been at the top of the heap, and now there's no choice except either to run like hell to stay where we are, never getting any place else, or to start the long slide down. Me, I think we started down years ago. We've been the richest country in the world, we've been the most powerful, we've been the most influential, and—same as always—we got used to it. We got blasé. Because we couldn't climb any higher, we stopped being able to advance. There hasn't been anything genuinely new in the States for years and years, just changes rung on what we already had. But of course we were afraid of being overtaken. So we drifted into this mess we're in right now, where we care more about our own selfishness and greed than we do about anyone or anything else. What's a good career for a bright young man these days? Why, the security force—or a tidy slot in the hierarchy of Energetics General—or something of that kind. Where are our poets, our musicians, our inventors? They've turned reb! And got stamped on!" She glanced at him. "Aren't I right?"

"Being 'on top' isn't the important thing," Sheklov said.

"Of course not," Magda snapped. "If it were, we'd feel satisfied. We'd feel—oh—fulfilled!"

"And we don't," Danty said. "Say, Vassily! There's one thing you haven't told us yet, and I have this impression that it's the most crucial point of all. Why in the world did they decide to risk sending you to the States? I mean, if Turpin is one of your agents, he must have been here for years—"

"Twenty-five," Sheklov said.

"That long? Hmm! Yes, it figures. And he can't be the only one, right?"

"No, he's not."

"So why did they have to send you? I mean, you could have walked straight into the jaws of the sexies, couldn't you? Lots of practice has made them very good at their job."

Sheklov thought for a long moment. Then he told them.

XXVI

AFTER THAT there seemed to be very little left to say. The car hummed onward into the night. Clouds were closing in ahead of them; it felt as though the familiar prospect of the stars were being shut away. Sheklov, conscious of having long ago passed the point of no return, was resigned to letting happen what would.

And Danty, having heard the story in full, sank back in his seat with a ferocious scowl of concentration and said nothing for so long that eventually Sheklov dozed.

He was awoken at last by Magda's voice.

"I'm worn out!" she said loudly. "It's nearly dawn."

"Then I guess I'd better take the wheel again," Sheklov said. "Danty can't drive one-handed, and" with a glance behind him, blinking to clear sleep from his eyes—"Lora's still asleep, isn't she?"

"Looks like it," Danty said. "I'd take my turn if I could—but this arm's stiffening up pretty bad. Mag', can we like pull in for breakfast? I'd like to get to a washroom and change the dressing on this cut." He checked, seeming to be struck by an idea. "Say! Make the left branch at the next interchange, will you? I'm getting it clearer in my head now. We have to shoot for the border in North Dakota some place. I'll know it when I see it."

"Service zone four miles," Magda read from a sign. "That must be after the next interchange, then. Will do . . . By the way, how are you feeling?"

"As though that crack on the head loosened my brains," Danty said with a shrug. "But I'll live."

Properly roused from sleep now, Sheklov looked out at the morning as it spread across the vast net of the superway. A web spun by an inconceivable spider, a mesh of concrete offering the illusion of freedom to go, yet turning you back whenever you approached the limits you must not exceed . . .

Yes. A metaphor of the country. Perhaps of the human condition. Horrible!

All his doubts stormed back into his mind. For a brief instant he was able to imagine that he had dreamed his admissions of last night; then Danty said, "Vassily, how are you?" And he knew they had been real.

"As well as can be expected," Sheklov said with ghoulish humour.

"That goes for all of us." He rubbed his eyes. "Mag' I've only been dozing, not completely asleep. I've been working it out. North Dakota, like I said. If we go over as a party, we're likely to be recognised. I don't know why or how. I only feel it. I'm still trying to sort that out. But something else keeps getting in the way. Vassily, you did say, didn't you, that the aliens showed pictures of Earth?"

"Nine still pictures," Sheklov said.

"Could you—well—maybe draw them for me?"

"I guess so," Sheklov answered after a moment for thought. "I looked at the photographs often enough. Might not get the details right, but in principle they'd be correct."

"Fine," Danty said, and gave his crooked smile. "Over breakfast I'll take you up on it. Mag', isn't that the service zone up ahead?"

The restaurant of the service zone was nearly empty. Only a couple of incurious long-distance truck-drivers glanced at them as they entered. Having collected coffee and food from the counter, they sat down around a table isolated in the centre of the room and Danty produced a stack of paper serviettes.

"Okay, Vassily, shoot," he said, and sat back, sipping his coffee.

"What are you doing?" Lora said dispiritedly. She had hardly seemed to be awake when she stumbled from the car; now she sat with eyes red, hair tangled, displaying every sign of exhaustion, as though she had been the one who had to drive through the night. Magda, by contrast, seemed hardly

affected. Pale, perhaps, but calm-faced and moving without obvious signs of fatigue.

"Drawing," Sheklov said, unclipping a ballpen from his pocket. He added, reaching for the first of the pile of white serviettes, "And I'm not very good at it. But I'll do what I can."

He captioned each drawing as he completed it with quick sure strokes; he had studied these enigmatic pictures—or at least the photos of them brought back from Pluto's orbit, smeared a little with free-space cosmic radiation, but with pretty good detail surviving—and they were branded on his memory. Of course, pen-sketches like these were hard to make clear. He added a caption to each, summarising what the experts had deduced about them.

Finally, when the others had finished their food, he gestured for a space to be cleared and laid them out in sequence in front of Danty.

"This first one is obviously a view of our galaxy," he said. "One can see the spiral arms. Then there's a clear view of the alien ship, which is a plain ovoid, but quite unlike anything of ours, so it's unmistakable. Then there's a view of the sun from a long way out in space—from about where the alien ship is orbiting, in fact. You can be certain of that because the constellations in the background match. I don't know astronomy well enough to do more than dot them in. Then there's a view of Earth, here; the continents are perfectly recognisable, though they're partly masked by cloud, as though the aliens are working from a particular picture.

"After that, there's a human-built rocket, possibly a satellite-launcher,

possibly one of our own ships that made the Pluto trip first. That's interesting; apparently the engineers have spotted some detail-refinements in the design, and they seem promising. It's rather as though you were to try and draw a Model T from memory and absentmindedly make it look like a much more recent make of car.

"Then there's this. An explosion. Notice it's centred on the United States. And in the original—I'm afraid I haven't drawn this very well—in the actual picture you can see it's nuclear. The likeliest explanation, the one which frightens us so much, and drove my superiors to send me here, is that it's a strike by the aliens."

Magda was staring, fascinated, although Lora was leaning back in her chair with her eyes half-closed and Danty was bestowing only casual glances on each successive picture. Suddenly irritated by his lack of interest, Sheklov let his tone grow sharper.

"Next is this one, a plain circle. That puzzles us terribly. But the logical conclusion is that it's the Earth again, wiped out by clouds of dust and smoke. Because here . . ." He reached for the last two drawings.

"This is fire. No mistake about it. Something burning violently. And last of all there's—this."

He laid down the caveman picture, the figure draped in skins waving a stone axe. And sat back.

There was a dead silence.

Eventually Danty picked up the drawings, like Magda gathering her tarot cards, and reversed them. He laid them out again on the table in the opposite order, turning each around as he set it down so as to be the correct

way up from Sheklov's viewpoint: the other side of the table.

"No," he said. "*This way.*"

For a long moment Sheklov stared at them. Then he raised his eyes to Danty's calm, amused face.

"Are you—sure?" he said huskily.

"As sure as I am that we're going to find a way over the border, dodge the guards, dodge the mines, get to safety. And that's close to one hundred per cent. I only got one life, Vassily, and I'm fond of it in spite of everything."

Sheklov sat frozen. In his mind he could hear words, as clear as though someone were uttering them aloud:

The last shall be first, and the first . . .

"Right," Danty said with a chuckle. "Let's move on."

XXVII

"**B**UT HE WAS WRONG," Bratcheslavsky murmured, taking from its pack yet another of his endless series of *papyrosi* and bending its cardboard tube to a right angle preparatory to lighting it at the flame of the hanging brass lamp which swung from the centre of the small room's white ceiling.

Standing by the window which gave such a fine view of the city of Alma-Ata, shrouded at the moment in the pale grey mists of early evening, Sheklov said without looking around, "Of course he wasn't. He was simply lying."

He sighed and helped himself to a cigarette from the pack, then came to join Bratcheslavsky on the cushions piled here and there across the floor, not randomly but with the imprecise symmetry of a Japanese sand-garden.

"But you knew the whole border was heavily beset with patrols. And the further the frontier zone from a major city and major roads—in North Dakota, for example, where you were heading for—the more it's likely to be infested with these 'private' defence forces. You must have realised that!"

"Naturally I did." Savouring the aromatic tobacco, Sheklov let a puff of smoke drift into the updraught from the lamp-flame. Glints of light flashed on its supporting chains.

"And you didn't try and argue with him? Not at all?"

"I was past the stage of disbelieving him," Sheklov said after a short pause. "I'd been convinced, long before, that he was possessed of a talent I'd barely dreamed of."

"And it's lost!" Bratcheslavsky barked, jumping to his feet in the first access of honest rage Sheklov had ever seen from him. "When I think what use we could have made of him—*ach!*"

Sheklov remained squatting on his cushions, gazing up at the old man who had been his mentor for so long, seeing him with curiously different eyes. He felt that his mission, brief as it had been, had altered him. Aged him? Yes, possibly it was only that . . . yet he felt it reached deeper into his personality. He felt not simply that he had crammed a great many years into the space of a few weeks, but also that he'd been educated.

Educated? Enlightened? No, that still wasn't the precise turn of phrase he was after. He cogitated, and suddenly he had it.

Made more wise.

Yes. Yes, exactly. He had had his entire perspective on the world, the human condition, the universe, turned

upside-down—and the new version was no less real than the traditional one. He was in the predicament of a savage shown a mirror for the first time, who has painfully to learn the truth that a man's right hand reflected in a mirror is his left.

But all that had been present in his mind while he was in Canada, arranging his onward journey to Russia with the aid and connivance of the company whose representative he had nominally been during his time in the States. So now it had flashed back to his awareness in less than the blink of an eye, and Bratcheslavsky was still talking.

"Not only that, what's more! Not just a man with a talent we'd give our eye-teeth to control! But very likely Turpin too, who's been a mainstay of human survival for a quarter of a century!"

"But they don't suspect him of being an agent, do they?" Sheklov demanded. "Only of—uh—contact with subversives!"

"There's too damned good a chance of his being tried for treason." Curtly. "Navy has jumped into the mess with both feet, and every corporation that's jealous of Energetics General is demanding a chance to take over the defence contracts, and all in all you never saw anything more like the Byzantine Empire in your life! I wouldn't bet against the possibility of the president being deposed, I swear I wouldn't!"

"By an Army coup?"

"Yes, of course. It's inevitable, you know, once you let the armed forces take over key organs of your government. Simply because they can impose rigid discipline on their members, whereas the loose inchoate mass of the

public is uncontrollable, they're bound to wind up giving the orders. Didn't we come perilously close to it ourselves a couple of times? And it wasn't good judgment that saved us, only luck!"

Bratcheslavsky tore the cigarette from his mouth and gave it a searing glare; he had bitten completely through its cardboard tube. Tossing it into a sandbowl with an oath, he lit another.

"But surely, even if we do lose Turpin," Sheklov countered, "this process will bear out what Marxism has always prophesied: the dissolution of the capitalist state into a brutal internal power-struggle. There'll be so many factions we'll be able to feed in spies, saboteurs, subversives, anyone we choose. All we'll have to do is identify those of the competing parties which are prepared to sell out in order to do down their rivals. Ten years of that, and America will never be a menace to the world again."

"You're an optimist these days!" Bratcheslavsky grunted.

"I have good reason. I found things over there I wasn't expecting, would have assumed not to exist. Admittedly, they are neither officially admitted nor properly understood, but they exist, and I'm here because they do."

He drew a deep breath.

"Look! My stay there was measured in days! I don't believe I could have run across what I did unless these—these virtues and talents are widespread. Just consider!" He raised a finger. "First, I encountered someone with a talent we'd never imagined to be real, only it *was* real and I had proof. What's more, he . . . Well, it's an unfashionable virtue, but it is one."

"Self-sacrifice," Bratcheslavsky said. "Yes."

There was a long cold pause. During it Sheklov felt himself carried back in space and time, to the train he had taken over the Canadian border on Danty's instructions. None of them had the mind to question his orders by that stage. No one had suspected the genuineness of his Canadian passport; for him it had been easy. For Lora and Magda, somewhat harder . . . but there was a well-established underground railway into Canada, had been for over a generation, and it had been surprisingly simple to obtain advice and even a guide. (Of course he'd only heard the details afterwards.)

For Danty, though . . .

He'd looked out of the train's window, and seen that car racing down one of the blocked stub-ends of dirt road heading north, and behind a mask of trees he'd seen that rose of flame. Just for a moment, a second or two.

Why? *Why?* Merely so as to ensure that when his train was checked by the border-guards, most of them would have been diverted to investigate the explosion? It was far too high a price!

But he continued, raising another finger. "And I met Magda, who in spite of the stifling effects of public conformism had worked out, from the inside, the true historical analogies for her country's predicament. And"—a third finger—"Lora, who behaved in this crazy manner and nonetheless was ready to abandon her old life for good and all, simply because she'd discovered that her father had lied to her since she was born. That hatred of hypocrisy is a healthy sign . . . Did you bring them out safely, by the way? I didn't hear."

"Yes, it was confirmed this morning. They wanted to stay in Canada, I'm afraid, but of course we couldn't allow that, not since they both knew about you and Turpin. But don't worry—we'll make them comfortable and take care of them."

Fine," Sheklov said dispiritedly, and stubbed his cigarette in the sandbowl. "Tell me something," he added after a moment. "Why do you think Danty did it?"

"I can only guess," Bratcheslavsky said. "Still, it'll be an enlightened guess. I'm an old man, and I've been through so much in one lifetime I seem to have summed up whole generations of human experience. Not about the material world, but about the spiritual world. The material world is run by people like those"—he jerked his head at the door of the room, through which they were soon going to have to pass in order to explain something vitally significant to people who would have no conception of its true importance—"Who are merely efficient. Good at ruling, good at directing, good at ordering other people about. That wasn't Danty's talent. His was for influencing people, encouraging them; not an engineer's talent, but an artist's."

"Yes!" Sheklov said, almost surprised.

"You envy him that gift, don't you?"

"I . . . Yes, I do."

"But it killed him at twenty-one." The words hung in the air like smoke. "And there's only one reasonable explanation. Thanks to the gift, he saw something ahead for him which would have been intolerable."

"I—I guess so. But what?"

"I think you told me, didn't you? Something you heard from his friend

Magda. The prospect of endless years of fear, of expecting that one day he would sense a crisis coming which he was powerless to prevent."

"And he preferred not to be doomed by others," Sheklov said. "He chose to make his own decision about an end."

"But he left a precious legacy." Bratcheslavsky said. He twisted around on his cushions and picked up a pile of shiny thick white cards, which he held out to Sheklov. Distracted, the younger man took them and turned them over.

They were a set of the pictures from the far-distant reaches of space, which he had so crudely copied for Danty to examine, and which he had so brilliantly and rapidly understood although scores, hundreds of experts had struggled vainly with them for years.

He said, "The ship has gone, hasn't it?"

"You mean arrived," Bratcheslavsky said with a sour grin.

"Yes . . ."

Automatically, Sheklov was shuffling the pictures into the reverse of the standard order, meantime visualising himself, a few minutes from now, consciously imitating what Danty had done with those rough sketches in a roadside restaurant.

Born at the wrong end of time . . . Oh, what could be wrong with this sick species, mankind, that it had taken Danty with his special, his improbable talent to see the plain and obvious truth? Deformed by fear and suspicion, everybody's mind but his had read threats into these pictures! (He rehearsed himself saying to Turpin, the morning of his arrival in the States, "New York may well be wiped off the

(Continued on page 110)

The Man Who Lived

by David Wright O'Brien

Into Percival Piff's shaking hands Fate thrust a newspaper—dated one week hence! But beware Fate, practical joker, when she bears you gifts!

A Classic Reprint from **AMAZING STORIES**

"I T'S not that I'm afraid. It's just, well—"

Percival Piff choked off the remainder of his sentence, shuffling his feet uneasily and attempting to avoid his wife's cold stare.

"A coward, afraid of the dark!" his spouse Matilda stormed contemptuously. She placed her large red hands on her wide hips and glared balefully at him. "Afraid to go down in the basement just because it's dark down there!"

Mr. Piff winced, his frail body instinctively tensing in defense from her scorn, his mild blue eyes regarding the packages lying on the floor. The packages Matilda wanted him to take down to the cellar. He tried a last appeal.

"I don't like this house, Matilda," he protested. "I'm sorry we ever moved here. The place gives me the creeps, especially the basement."

"We haven't even been living here a week," Matilda's voice was growing shriller. "And you haven't done a thing to help us get settled."

Matilda paused to point dramatically to the disarranged furniture.

"If you'd help straighten things, carry packages, and make yourself generally useful, we could settle down and



Next Week



enjoy this splendid home. After all, this bungalow once belonged to a very noted scientist. We should feel honored to live here. But instead, you have to grouse about everything."

Mr. Piff opened his mouth to protest, but his wife continued before he could get a word out.

"Here it is the third day of September," she threw her paw wide in a gesture to include a desk calendar, "and we aren't even near to being settled!"

Matilda paused to point dramatically.

Mr. Piff's features didn't have to register resignation. He was born with that emotion already stamped there. But the expressive shrug of his shoulders admitted defeat, and he stooped to pick up the packages Matilda wanted removed to the basement.

Grimly triumphant, Matilda pushed a lank moist strand of hair from her flushed fat face and assisted her husband, piling package after package into his arms until he was scarcely able to stand beneath their weight.

Mr. Piff made his way unsteadily to the door leading to the cellar, and proceeded cautiously down the steps. At the first landing he paused, feeling the damp air of the stygian pit rushing up to his nostrils. Damp air with an exceedingly peculiar odor, like that of old chemicals.

Mr. Piff could never be described as a rugged individual. His general appearance was that of a very small, very drab and terribly weary beanpole. He was as frail as Matilda was fat. The packages were heavy, and the cellar beneath him was dismally dark.

"Dark and dank," thought Mr. Piff, who had read a few mystery stories. "I don't like it."

The cellar was where the obscure chemico-physicist—the poor chap Matilda had referred to as the "distinguished scientist"—had kept his lab-

oratories when he'd lived in the bungalow. Mr. Piff decided that the peculiar odor must be the memory of those chemicals lingering on.

"Percivall!" Matilda's sharp voice came ringing to his rears. "Have you taken those bundles down yet?"

MR. PIFF gazed apprehensively at the darkness waiting at the bottom of those steps. He sighed again.

"Taking them down now, dear," he shouted in reply.

Bracing his slight shoulders, Mr. Piff moved cautiously down the steps, wishing that there was some light to guide him as the darkness folded over him like a heavy black cloak.

He shuddered. The dampness was chilling. He moved slowly down four more steps. Then he was standing at the bottom, on the cellar floor.

The odor of old chemicals was even stronger now. Mr. Piff waited, giving his eyes time to accustom themselves to the darkness, recalling that Matilda wanted the packages placed in the farthest corner from the stairs.

Even when he was able to half discern objects in the murky gray light, Mr. Piff hesitated about moving toward that corner. For it was darker, far darker than any other spot in the cellar. It was totally, terrifyingly black.

"As if," Mr. Piff told himself, remembering his mystery tales again, "something lurked there, waiting!"

Mr. Piff struggled with the temptation to chuck the packages immediately and get the hell out of there as quickly as his quaking knees would permit him. But the memory of Matilda, waiting sternly up there, stopped him.

He shuddered, stepping across the damp stone floor. Now he was less than five feet from that darkened nook. It was still hidden in ebony gloom. He inched a few steps closer to it. Closer.

Closer, and sweat stood out on his brow. He wanted to faint, to scream; in the reverse order, of course. But he did neither. He advanced even closer.

He took a deep breath and stepped into the blackness.

Dropping packages right and left in a veritable frenzy to be gone, Mr. Piff was at first unaware of anything but the blackness that surrounded him. But in less than four more seconds, he was aware of something else. He was conscious of an odd, eerie tingling that seemed to have taken control of his entire body.

Tingling — like electric vibrations running through his tissues. It was enough to startle the upper plate out of a stronger man; and Percival Piff, being a mouse, screamed once and ran hell-bent for the stairs.

He gained the first landing in what almost amounted to a leap, and in another six seconds was back in his living room, slamming the door behind him, leaning breathlessly against it and opening and closing his eyes.

The strange electric tingling was almost gone, but he could still feel it by proxy. He gave way to spasms of long, violent shudders. Tremulously, he sucked in his breath and looked around for Matilda.

Matilda was nowhere to be seen.

Then he thought again of that tingling. It was horrible. Something—Mr. Piff was now certain—lurked there in the darkened corner. Something beside the packages he'd dropped!

Weakly, Mr. Piff staggered from the living room into the kitchen. There was still no sign of Matilda. She must have stepped out to a neighbors, or into the yard. Gratefully, he slumped into a kitchen chair.

"I don't like this house," he moaned sorrowfully. "There's something awful about it. I knew it all along. I

know it now!"

Then, clapping his hand to his brow, Mr. Piff got his first shock.

ABSTRACTEDLY, his gaze had included his cuff. Subconsciously, his mind had registered its appearance. With a start he leaped to his feet, gazing wildly up and down his body.

He was clothed in his blue serge suit—which was not incredible. *But when he had entered the cellar, he had been wearing his gray tweed suit*—which was impossible!

Mr. Piff fought for a grip on himself. His memory must have slipped from his scare. Yes. That was it. He laughed aloud, weakly, and without conviction. His memory had slipped.

"Ha, ha," said Mr. Piff uneasily, "what a joke on myself!"

He had no sooner finished his sentence when the doorbell rang. Thankful for its interruption, Mr. Piff dashed to the living room and opened the door—to admit Matilda, arms full of groceries.

For the first time in twelve years, Mr. Piff was glad to see his wife. He said so.

"Gosh, dear," said Mr. Piff. "I'm glad you came back. You didn't tell me you were going shopping. Must have done it in a rush."

Matilda, depositing the bundles on the telephone table, gave him a long, searching gaze.

"What are you babbling about?" she inquired coldly. "I've been out all day, and you know it."

It came to Mr. Piff at that moment that Matilda couldn't possibly have changed her clothes—she had been wearing a housecoat when he'd seen her last—and gone out shopping in the short time since she'd shouted down the basement steps at him!

And, besides, didn't she just say that

she'd been out *all day*?

"What are you babbling about?" Matilda repeated sharply.

"N-n-n-othing," stammered Mr. Piff in confusion. "Just wanted to tell you that I took those packages down as you asked me."

"Down where?"

"Down," said Mr. Piff, "in the cellar. In the corner, as you asked me."

Matilda placed her paws on her ample hips, a favorite gesture of hers.

"What," she demanded, "is wrong with you? If you weren't such a sissy, I'd swear you'd been drinking. You took those packages downstairs last week!"

Mr. Piff wheeled, looking wildly about the living room. He hadn't thought to notice any change in its appearance before. But now he could see—and marvel. The rugs were all carefully laid, and the furniture—which had been in disorder the last time he'd looked—was neatly arranged!

"Things have changed!" he gasped. "Everything was different ten minutes ago. You were different. I was different. The house was different!"

Fear clutching at his bosom, he staggered across the room to the desk calendar. It read—"September 10th!"

A week had passed without Percival Piff's personal knowledge!

Mr. Piff wasn't certain how, or why, or what had happened. But whatever it was, one thing was clear. Something horrible had taken place. He felt weak, giddy, watery in the knees.

"Rip Van Winkle Piff," he muttered hoarsely.

"What's that you said?" demanded Matilda.

"Nothing, nothing," Mr. Piff replied dazedly. "I just feel a little weak, that's all." He slumped down on the sofa.

"Huh!" snorted Matilda. "Weak, in-

deed! I'd like to know from what!" And with that burst of warm sympathy, she left the room.

After many minutes of exhausted meditation on the sofa, Mr. Piff's conscious mind arrived at an explanation for what had happened. It was simple enough. He was the victim of amnesia. He'd had a loss of memory that lasted a week.

BUT that was merely his conscious mind speaking for him.

Deep back in the darkened corners of his brain, Mr. Piff's subconscious was hard at work, tossing devilish speculations at him with satanic insistence.

"Amnesia!" these tiny voices scoffed. "A likely explanation! Bah!"

It was to no avail that Mr. Piff tried to silence these tiny voices.

"Go on, Piff," these subconscious demons urged, "find out the real truth. Amnesia, bunk!"

Quite suddenly, and without his will directing it, Mr. Piff found his steps taking him across the room to the door leading to the cellar. A minute later and he was once again moving cautiously across the damp darkness of the cellar floor. He hadn't wanted to come here again. It was as though some hidden power greater than his fear had led him back to the place.

If the sight of that black cellar corner had frightened Mr. Piff on his first visit, he was thoroughly terrified by it now. The odor of old chemicals was once again strong in his nostrils, and it was all he could do to force his legs to carry him across to the corner.

He was less than three feet from the stygian curtained corner, less than three feet now from its eerie blackness, and sweat stood out on his brow, trickling slowly down his sharp nose.

Breathing a prayer of supplication, he shut his eyes and stepped forward.

It happened again.

The odd, electric tingling had hit him instantly upon stepping into the ebony depths of the corner. And again it flooded his tissues, vibrating through his entire body. Forcing himself, by supreme heroics of will, to remain stationary in the corner, Mr. Piff allowed the weird current to do its damndest.

At last, stumbling and gasping, his heart hammering with the force of a riveter's, Mr. Piff burst out from the darkened nook and groped a hasty retreat to the stairs. A moment later, and he was again inside the living room, with the door slammed tight behind him. For the second time, he leaned against the comforting support of the wall, trying to force his nerves to calm somewhat, keeping his eyes shut tight.

"Well!" the voice belonged to Matilda, and Mr. Piff opened his eyes to see her standing before him, dressed in a housecoat and glaring balefully.

"You certainly took enough time about putting those packages down there, worm," she spat contemptuously. Mr. Piff, however, wasn't paying the slightest attention to her tone of voice. It was *what* she said, not *how* she said it, that made him go weak in the knees.

He noticed her housecoat next, and a wild glance showed him that he himself was dressed once more in his gray tweed suit! Another terrified glance revealed the disordered arrangement of the furniture, the fact that the rugs were not yet laid!

Matilda was continuing her diatribe. But Mr. Piff paid no attention to it. Dazedly, he crossed the room to the desk calendar, glanced at it, and clutched a chair for support.

It was September 3rd again! Where-as before he had gone back into the cellar, it was *September 10th!*

Somehow, he was back a week again. It hadn't been amnesia! A week, just

like that!

Mr. Piff threw a hand to his fevered brow and stood there, swaying weakly back and forth. The tiny demons, rulers of his subconscious, were gloating again.

"Ahaaaa, Piff! We told you so," said the tiny voices. "Amnesia, bunk! You traveled a week ahead, that's what you did. And now you're back in the present again!"*

Muttering angrily, Matilda strode out of the room. But Mr. Piff didn't notice her exit. He sank down on the divan, letting his head rest in his hands.

CHAPTER II

Things to Come

MR. PIFF did a great deal of thinking. Straight through dinner, throughout the evening, and into the early hours of the morning he struggled to find a solution to this astonishing enigma. For a few hours he had argued around the idea that he might be going mad. Might already be as nutty as a fruit cake. But the tiny voices in the back of his brain erased such notions.

"Try it again," the voices insisted. "Try it again and see!"

So Mr. Piff, armed with a flashlight, had donned his bathrobe and slippers, and descended once again to the cellar. The place had lost its terror for him; due, perhaps, to the fact that it had become a brain-racking problem. Instead of the fear he had felt on his other two visits, he now moved through the

Eddington postulates that our time-sense is based on a sensory perception of entropy; which term, although usually associated with thermodynamics, is more generically the measure of the "running-down" of the universe. By isolating a portion of space and changing the rate of entropy within that portion, we thereby change the rate of elapse of time within that portion. Undoubtedly this is what happens to Mr. Piff when he undergoes the peculiar vibration.—Ed.

dark gloom of the place with a sort of awe.

Nevertheless, he hesitated for a few moments before playing the beam of his flashlight into the darkened corner. Mr. Piff was still very much uncertain as to what might be lurking behind that stygian veil.

He closed his eyes and shot the beam toward the corner. Nothing happened, so he opened his eyes again and looked to see what would be revealed.

There was nothing in the corner save the packages he'd dropped there—and a small, box-like object about the size of a small radio. The object was covered by a small tarpaulin.

Mr. Piff gained a certain measure of confidence from this.

"Well, well," he murmured throatily. "Well, well," and he advanced to the corner.

With a quick gesture, like a man peeling a piece of adhesive plaster from a hairy arm, Mr. Piff reached forward and jerked the tarpaulin from the radio-sized object. The resulting cloud of dust left him blinded and choking for a moment or two.

At last he fanned the dust from his eyes. The object even looked like a radio. Except that it was steel, chrome steel, and had very different dials on the front of it, Mr. Piff would have been sure it was a radio. The thing was humming, a faint sort of buzzing hum. Mr. Piff reached out and snapped off a button on the side. The humming ceased abruptly.

He stepped closer to it then, and bent over an engraved plate on the top.

The plate read, "Fleming's Futurescope."

Then Mr. Piff remembered the name. Fleming, of course! Fleming was the chemist chap who had lived here before.

"Must have belonged to Fleming,"

observed Mr. Piff with the air of a detective who has unearthed a damning bit of evidence. Then he knit his brows.

"Futurescope?" He gazed thoughtfully at it, thinking, while little chills held races up and down his spine, of his experiences with this machine. Thinking of how they were definitely hinged on the future.

"Gosh," he gulped throatily, "then this accounts for it all!"

Mr. Piff's brain was assembling all the facts, relegating them to their proper status, and drawing an utterly logical, though quite unbelievable, conclusion. This thing, this tiny chrome steel box, radio, or what-have-you, had transported him into the future—and had returned him to the present!

IT was preposterous. It couldn't be true. Anyone with more brains than Percival Piff would have known it couldn't be true. But Mr. Piff was used to believing things on their face value. He had been tossed into the future, then back into the present. This thing was called a Futurescope. That was enough for Mr. Piff. As far as he was concerned, that was that.

He stared long and thoughtfully at the little box as if expecting it to explain its workings verbally to him. Then he snapped on the button. The buzzing hum resumed promptly. After a moment, the same tingling sensations as before assailed him.

"Aha!" smiled Mr. Piff. "This is going to be fun."

He chuckled, feeling the tingling race through his body. Now that he knew what this was all about, now that he had some idea of what was going to happen, there was no fear attached to the process at all.

After waiting what seemed to be the right length of time, Mr. Piff stepped away from the machine. Crossing the

cellar, he climbed the stairs leading to the living room. Once inside his house proper, again, he looked around expectantly.

Sure enough, the furniture was arranged and the rugs were down. He looked down to see that he was even wearing a different set of pajamas.

Just to make certain, Mr. Piff crossed the room again and looked at the desk calendar. He was once more a week into the future. He shook his head.

"Tsk, ts, what won't they think of next?"

Mr. Piff looked at his watch. It was six o'clock. Should he go to work, when the time came to do so in another hour, here in the future, or go to work *last* week; which, although highly complicated, was really *this* week? He decided to return to the present, and turned, to descend to the cellar again, when he heard a thump on the back porch. The sound informed him that the morning paper had just been delivered.

"Next week's newspaper," thought Mr. Piff. Then, with the force of a plank swung against the base of the skull, a thought struck him. It was staggering. *That newspaper contained news and knowledge that would not be known to anyone but Mr. Piff for a week!*

"Gosh," gasped Mr. Piff, all a-tremble, "gosh!"

Hastily, he padded out onto the back porch and brought in the paper. Spreading it out on the kitchen table, he sat down to read it.

He had no sooner glanced at the headlines than a voice shrilled at his ears—Matilda's, of course. He cursed himself in a mild sort of way for having slammed the kitchen door on coming in from the porch. It had evidently awakened her.

"Percival Piff, what *are* you doing up this hour?"

Mr. Piff shuddered, lifted his head. "Nothing dear, just reading next week's news."

The words had come out before he thought. And now he bit his tongue in remorse. Matilda's reply was immediate, and seething with indignation.

"You snake!" her voice shrilled down to him. "You miserable snake! Deliberately thumping around to wake me up, and then getting smart-alecky about it!"

He could hear sounds of Matilda's ample bulk bounding out of bed.

"You wait right there." Her voice was ominous. "I'll be right down to settle this, here and now!"

TERRIFIED, Mr. Piff clutched the newspaper and raced into the living room. Then he plummeted down the cellar steps, paper still clutched to his breast. In an instant he was standing beside the Futurescope. It was still buzzing.

He felt the tingling take command of his body. Percival Piff grinned. Matilda would come down too late to catch him!

When Mr. Piff emerged from the corner again he was serene in the knowledge that he was safe, that he had returned to the present. On going upstairs, seeing the disarranged furniture, and taking a quick glance at the desk calendar, he was positive.

Mr. Piff went into the kitchen and sat down to resume his perusal of next week's news. And as he paged through the various sections of the paper, he was struck by the enormous possibilities of the thing.

Why, it was incredible! He could even find out in advance how his favorite comic strip was faring!

Eagerly, therefore, he turned to "Orphan Agnes", the adventures of this young lady having long provided sheer

joy in his uneventful existence. His hands shook a little as he held the paper, for only yesterday Orphan Agnes had been left tied to a buzz-saw in a deserted mill by a one-eyed Chinaman. The comics of the week ahead would certainly show whether or not she had been saved.

She was. Mr. Piff sighed. Orphan Agnes was safe and sound, and in the middle of another adventure.

"That's good," he said gratefully. "I was left pretty darned worried yesterday."

The next moment Mr. Piff heard a thumping noise on the back steps. The paper had just been delivered for the morning. The paper of the present. Old stuff. Mr. Piff didn't bother to glance up. He concentrated instead on his exclusive future edition.

He paged rapidly through the financial sections, for they had always bored him. He had never been able to understand about stocks and bonds and margin. Too complicated.

After avidly reading the remaining comic strips, Mr. Piff turned to the sporting section of the paper. There was nothing much there. Just a summary of the "past week's racing results. He would have passed the summary by, but he thought suddenly of the fellow employees in his office who played the races every day. He tore the summary out; for, although he didn't follow the ponies himself, the others might appreciate it to have the winners in advance.

"They might like it," Mr. Piff muttered vaguely, and stuffed the torn section into his pocket. Then he scanned the news section hurriedly, for he heard sounds of Matilda stirring upstairs. He didn't want her to wake up and catch him down in the kitchen.

His eyes widened at a column of type he saw.

"My goodness," Mr. Piff said in hor-

ror, "Just look at this!" Then, lips moving, he read the account silently. "District Attorney Murdered In Street!" he gasped. "Why, that's awful, mowed down by machine guns in a racing automobile!"

Sounds of Matilda stirring about in the bedroom upstairs became increasingly louder. He rose. Matilda would catch him down here if he didn't hurry. Folding the paper under his arm, Mr. Piff padded down to the basement, where he threw it into the blazing furnace and watched it burn.

"She won't be able to get her hands on it now," he said to himself.

He sighed then, and retraced his steps to the living room. Stretching out on the couch, he closed his eyes for an hour's nap before going to work. But before he dropped off to sleep, he told himself,

"Matilda mustn't know about this. I don't think she'd approve."

This was exciting. The only exciting thing that had ever entered the drab existence of Percival Piff. He smiled and closed his eyes, and in another few minutes was dozing peacefully.

CHAPTER III

Mr. Piff Predicts

FOR the next several days Percival Piff lived in an incredibly rosy world. Each day, as he went to work, his head swam with assorted information gathered on his nightly trips to the future. Of course, he had finally had to decide that he couldn't tell a soul about the discovery of the Futurescope. For it would only make trouble, and no one would believe him. Least of all Matilda.

However, he was able to find some occasional outlets for the power he possessed. There was, for example, the matter of horse playing. Mr. Piff had

decided against giving his racing summary to his fellow office employees. He couldn't tell them what horses would win and expect them to believe him, without revealing his source of information. And he could hardly do that. They'd think him loony.

So Mr. Piff compromised with the situation. He played the races himself, wagering a daily quarter on a sure thing selected from the summary he'd torn from the newspaper. It gave him a feeling of bravado to play the spend-thrift, the devil-may-care plunger before the rest of the office staff.

Twenty-five cents a day. On a horse. Just like that. That was Percival Piff for you. Reckless!

But, of course, he couldn't lose. And once or twice he had a twinge of guilt about it. He knew it really wasn't fair to the gentlemen who took bets down at the cigar store. But he smoothed his conscience by telling himself that they probably could afford to lose now and then. It made him feel better when he convinced himself that they could afford to sustain their losses. After all, he didn't want to break them.

And in the meantime Mr. Piff found another outlet for his power. He arrived at it quite by chance, during the half-hour lunch siesta awarded the employees of Hammer, Hammer and Tongs, for whom Mr. Piff had labored in diligent obscurity these twenty years. During this half hour for lunch, it was the habit of the workers not going out to eat to sit around the office, gossiping and conversing generally while they consumed the fare they brought with them in little paper bags.

Mr. Piff was one of the paper-bag brigade, but he had never been a party to much of the noontime gossip. Somehow he never figured prominently when viewpoints were being aired. But during this particular lunch period—it was

on the third morning following his discovery of the Futurescope—he pricked up his ears and listened attentively to the comment, while thoughtfully munching his lettuce sandwich.

"This city is too damned full of crime," bellowed a Mr. Boodle, from the shipping room.

The conversation had been centering around politics, and Mr. Boodle had worked his fat face into an angry crimson over the topic.

"Too full of crime," Boodle repeated, thumping his ham-like fist down on Mr. Piff's desk to emphasize the point. "And the D. A. don't do nothing about it! Nothing at all. He's as big a crook as the rest!"

Mr. Piff, who had never particularly liked Mr. Boodle, saw his chance and stepped into the argument.

"The District Attorney is doing all he can to stop crime," he observed in a loud, though squeaky voice.

Every eye in the office turned to Mr. Piff. An utterance from him had been about as unexpected as gondolas would be on the Gobi Desert. There was a tense, surprised silence while they waited for him to continue.

Mr. Piff felt a funny feeling of excitement playing up and down his spine as he phrased his next sentence.

"As a matter of fact," he declared, "the District Attorney has grown so unpopular with certain of the—er—under-world element, that they intend to kill him next week!"

THE silence held for an instant longer, then exploded. Exploded into laughter in his face. This, from Mr. Piff, had apparently been just about the funniest thing they'd heard in ages.

"In on the know?" Boodle chortled sarcastically.

Mr. Piff, ears crimson, opened his

mouth for an indignant protest. Didn't those fools realize he knew? But no. Of course not. They didn't know, and wouldn't believe him even if he told them everything.

Additional uncomplimentary remarks were made, and quite suddenly Mr. Piff found himself standing up to face his hecklers.

"You mark my words," he shouted squeakily before he could stop himself. "You mark my words. That is my prediction!"

Then, aghast at the emotion that had been strong enough to make him lose his temper, Mr. Piff slumped back into his seat.

"Oh my," he thought. "Now I've done it. They'll think I'm an awful fool. I'll never live this down!"

But suddenly he remembered. It *would* come true. Of course it would come true. And he would be vindicated. Why, he'd been silly to worry. Everything would be all right. The tiny inner voices said,

"Courage, Piff. You know what's what."

So Mr. Piff turned on the office staff again.

"You wait and see," he repeated. "It's my prediction!"

The lunch period ended on this note. But Mr. Piff, returning to sort his invoices, felt grimly triumphant. He'd show them! Smart alecks, that's what they were. But they'd find out that P. Piff was no fool. No, sir!

In less than a week his prediction would come true, and then they would begin to show a proper respect for him. Why, just that one prediction alone would be enough to establish him as a person of some importance around the office!

So when Mr. Piff rolled down his sleeves and left the office for home, late that afternoon, he walked on fleecy

white columns of clouds. In his mind he had already half planned a gigantic campaign to gain the self-respect of his fellow workers. It would be easy. All he'd need would be one prediction a day. And then, when they all started coming true— He smiled in happy anticipation.

"Every day," he told himself, "I'll make a forecast of some sort." He paused. "Let's see," he frowned, "the District Attorney will be shot on the tenth. That's four days from now. That will be the first of my forecasts to come true. Then, with one a day from then on, it shouldn't be long."

Percival Piff smiled again. Already he was able to see them treating him as an equal. The sensation was enormously pleasing. He had never been considered as anything but a worm before.

Deliberately then Mr. Piff went down to his Futurescope every evening and traveled a week into the future. But it was not haphazardly that he did so. He had a purpose, now.

On these trips to the future he gathered odd data and information concerning things that were due to happen, returning to the present with his newfound knowledge every morning—so that he could take it to work with him and show off before the office crowd.

This gave Mr. Piff great satisfaction. And further satisfaction lay in a little box in his office drawer. It was a sum amassed from almost a week of daily wagers on the horse races.

The breathtaking total of this wealth was—four dollars and eighty-five cents!

TO Percival Piff this was utterly magnificent. Four eighty-five! Better, even, than a raise in pay! He was in seventh heaven. It meant money that Matilda never need know about. Money he could actually spend on himself if he wished.

Mr. Piff was beginning to appreciate the power vested in him by the Future-scope. The thing had its advantages. Undoubtedly. And he, Percival Piff, wasn't missing a trick. No sir!

And finally Mr. Piff awoke to the morning on which his first forecast was to prove itself.

CHAPTER IV

Personal Troubles

ON his way down to work, Percival Piff felt somewhat similar to that historic gentleman, Napoleon, when said gentleman was riding a gilded coach to be crowned Emperor at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

For this, September 10th, was Mr. Piff's day.

He had made certain that the exact hour of the District Attorney's assassination would fall shortly after noon. Approximately twelve-fifteen. The afternoon editions of the papers, therefore, would carry the news, and the office staff would learn of his astounding vindication before the day was over.

Percival Piff beamed at his fellow passengers on the elevated, and almost gave in to a wild impulse to chuck the chubby chin of a runny-nosed urchin who sat beside him.

He felt very fine. Very fine indeed. And yet, somehow, he didn't feel quite as splendid as circumstances should warrant. There was something on his mind, something that gave him a vague feeling of uneasiness. But for the life of him, he couldn't fathom what it was. It was similar to a twinge of conscience. But for the life of him, again, he could think of no reason for these birth pangs of guilt.

So he smiled again and he felt almost—but not quite—perfect as he sauntered into the offices of Hammer, Ham-

mer and Tongs. He removed his coat and proceeded to dig into his stack of invoices when the vague feeling of uneasiness returned.

Mr. Piff frowned. Mr. Boodle, wearing a truculent sneer, passed his desk, and Mr. Piff wouldn't have noticed him, except that Boodle spoke.

"What's your prediction today, Master Mind?"

Mr. Piff looked up sharply. "Eh—uh—what did you say?"

Mr. Boodle repeated his question mockingly, and Mr. Piff, staring abstractly at Boodle's beefy midriff, answered absently, giving a bit of political news. Boodle left then, laughing loudly and repeating the forecast to the other workers in the office.

The laughter nettled Mr. Piff, and he looked at his watch. In another four hours they'd know he was no fool. In another four hours the District Attorney would be—

Mr. Piff sat bolt upright, clapping his hands to his brow. That was it! Of course, that was it!

"My gosh!" he gasped. "I've been a fool, an utter inconsiderate fool."

It had suddenly dawned on him what had been plucking so insistently at his conscience. *The District Attorney was going to die!* The D. A. was going to be murdered; and he, P. Piff, was the only one who knew about it, who could prevent it.

Percival Piff—with that failing common to all humans—had been so wrapped up in the vindication of his predictions that he had completely forgotten the the vindication involved *murder*.

He felt ashamed of himself. His duty, of course, was crystal clear.

Percival rose and looked again at his watch. There was still four hours left in which, as a righteous citizen, he could save the District Attorney. He crammed

his hat on his head, shrugged into his coat, and rushed for the door.

Exactly thirty minutes later, he arrived wild-eyed and breathless at the offices of the District Attorney.

AN enormous policeman was stationed before the doors of the D. A.'s suite, and this worthy was almost startled out of his half slumber by the little man who dashed up to him and seized him by the arm.

"The District Attorney," gasped Mr. Piff, "where is he?"

The officer of Law and Order shook Mr. Piff's paw from his arm.

"Shure now, peanut, what is it yez want to see him about?"

"A murder!" groaned Mr. Piff, a-tremble at the very thought.

The policeman looked visibly shaken. Obviously Mr. Piff did not look like the type associated with violence.

"What's that?" the delegate of Peace and Security fairly bellowed. "A murder?"

Mr. Piff nodded, signifying that that was exactly what he meant. He opened his mouth to say more, but the corpulent cop had already wheeled and dashed inside the anteroom he had been guarding. Mr. Piff leaped to his heels, following him inside.

"There's a guy outside," the cop was gasping, "who sez there wuz a murder!"

He addressed another uniformed man, smaller and more intelligent looking, who seemed to be a Police Lieutenant. The Lieutenant spotted Mr. Piff.

"Is that the gentleman?" he asked, pointing at Percival Piff incredulously.

The big cop looked at Mr. Piff.

"Yah!" he growled.

Obviously the huge Guardian of Righteousness was more familiar with doorman duty and the peddling of tickets to the Police Ball, than he was with murders. The situation seemed

to have gotten away from him. But the Lieutenant was quite calm.

"What's this all about?" he asked Percival Piff.

"The District Attorney," breathed Mr. Piff. "Is the District Attorney in?"

The Lieutenant was losing patience.

"You can tell me what's on your mind," he snapped.

Mr. Piff gazed at him dubiously, then lowered his voice to a stage whisper.

"Someone," he hissed, "is going to murder the District Attorney, at twelve-fifteen." He raised his voice once more. "I thought he'd like to know about it."

The expression on the Lieutenant's face changed subtly. He was used to this sort of thing. Why was it, he wondered, that cranks were always such mousey little people. Gazing at Mr. Piff, he felt sure that this was the mousiest little crank he had ever run up against.

"Well," he said dryly. "I'm glad you let us in on that little item. You've no idea how much it will help."

Mr. Piff straightened his frail shoulders proudly.

"Thank you, Lieutenant," he said. "I thought it would."

The Lieutenant sighed under his breath and walked over to a drawer, where he took out some paper forms. If he got this little crackpot to fill out a complaint blank, the said crackpot should be satisfied. It usually made all the screwballs feel important.

"Here," said the Lieutenant, "fill in one of these. Give your name, address, place of business, et cetera. Then, just so we won't forget who to thank, you might put down the data about the District Attorney's murder."

With the dignity of a man receiving a decoration for conspicuous valor, Mr. Piff walked over to a desk and sat down. Then he carefully filled out the

form, blotted it, and handed it to the Lieutenant.

"Then everything will be taken care of?" he asked in a voice of immense relief.

"Yes, surely—" the Lieutenant looked down at the form—"Mr. Piff. Everything will be taken care of. Thank you very much."

He extended his hand, and Percival Piff shook it solemnly. Then he turned and made his exit, a citizen who had done his duty. The sense of foreboding that had been hanging over him had now vanished. He was quite relieved, and left the building whistling.

When noon arrived, and the office gossips gathered again, Mr. Piff munched his lunch and held his silence. There would be no vindication today. Time enough for that with another prediction tomorrow. He felt a glow of pride in the fact that he had so nobly sacrificed his vanity to duty. Besides, what was one prediction, more or less, in the life of a man who could foretell anything!

BOODLE was making derogatory remarks and Mr. Piff was ignoring them, when a commotion broke out in the hall outside the office. The lunchers all turned to face the door, and in the next instant four uniformed policemen, led by a man in a Lieutenant's chevrons, burst into the room!

One of the office stenogs screamed. Boodle let out a hoarse gasp. But Percival Piff, of them all, remained cool. He rose, smiling, for he recognized the man at the front of the van as the Lieutenant he had left several hours ago. He had a hunch, too, as to their reasons for coming here. They were probably going to commend P. Piff personally for what he had done that morning. And with the entire office staff looking on! Mr. Piff swelled with pride.

Mr. Piff waved a cheery greeting to the Lieutenant, who was advancing across the room. Waved a cheery greeting and said with very becoming modesty,

"Well, Lieutenant, I must say that this is quite unexpected."

Stanley, when he found Dr. Livingstone, couldn't have packed more drama into his historic line than Percival Piff put into that sentence.

Mr. Piff moved to meet the Police, feeling the eyes of the entire office upon him. Nonchalantly he extended his hand to the Lieutenant. The Lieutenant grabbed it; and in the next instant Mr. Piff was flying over his head. Swift jiu-jitsu!

Mr. Piff didn't get the drift of things very well, but it was clear, when four patrolmen hurled themselves upon his prostrate body, that no decoration or commendation was intended.

He heard the Lieutenant's voice, harsh and realistic, clearing up the situation for him.

"Piff," the Lieutenant snarled, "I arrest you for the murder of the District Attorney!"

CHAPTER V

Black Despair

UNDER different circumstances, Mr. Piff might have found his ride in the screaming, sirened squad car somewhat exhilarating, perhaps even thrilling. But under the present circumstances he was utterly terrified. He crouched in the rear of the car, guarded by five policemen, with his eyes shut tight in an effort to hide, ostrich fashion, from his woe.

Twenty minutes later he was bundled limp and unprotesting into the gloomy quarters of the "sweat room" at the Detective Bureau. There he was hand-

cuffed to a chair, while a thousand and one cops, plainclothes detectives and uniformed harness bulls harassed and tormented him.

Lights were blazing mercilessly into his eyes, and while he writhed there unable to escape, he was grilled for three hours. To Percival Piff, during this session of terror, the rasping voice of his spouse, Matilda, would have sounded like the singing of a lark.

The questions hurled at him by his inquisitors were as varied as they were stupid.

"Tell us how yuh done it," one questioner would rasp.

"Yeah, tell us the names of the boys yuh got to do the actual doity woik," another would follow.

"Come on, Piff, come clean! Sign this confession, or it'll be a lot worse for you later on," a third would shout.

And through it all, the blaze of lights, confusion and sweaty faces glaring at him, Percival Piff was able to make only one reply.

"Please," he repeated endlessly. "I didn't do it. I don't know who did it!"

For Mr. Piff knew that he could never, under any circumstances, tell them that he had picked up his advance knowledge of the crime from a newspaper account that hadn't then been written—in a paper that hadn't at that time been published. It would have been too preposterous an explanation, and would have served only to further increase the wrath of his tormentors. He had enough grief pressing down on his miserably bent little shoulders as it was.

Finally, utterly spent, Percival Piff was taken to the County Jail, where he was locked up for the night. This was at five o'clock, and he lay exhausted on the hard gray cot in his tiny cell until the turnkey came with his supper an hour later.

The rattling of keys in the lock of

his cell door made Mr. Piff sit up on his cot.

The turnkey was short, fat, good-natured and bald. Mr. Piff perceived all this in a glance.

"Well, well," said the turnkey, in the jovial tones of a mortician during a boom season, "well, well! You don't look like no killer to me."

"Thank you," said Mr. Piff, taking a tin plate of beans from his hand. "I am glad to hear somebody say so."

The turnkey scratched his bald head. "But yuh never kin tell, I allus say. I seen a lotta killers in my day. The brainy type allus looks like innercent peepul."

Mr. Piff, disdaining to reply to this change of sentiment, took a steaming tin cup of coffee from the fellow.

"Come, come," said the turnkey. "Don't take it so hard. It ain't as bad as it seems. Before yuh know it, they'll have fried yuh, and it won't make a bit of difference then."

PERCIVAL PIFF was not blessed with a strong constitution, and the last remark made him put down his plate of beans hurriedly. He let his head rest in his hands, and remained in that position, shaking like a man with a chill.

"What's wrong?" The turnkey seemed perplexed. "Did I say somethin' to offend yuh?"

"Go away," Mr. Piff managed to groan. "Go away and leave me alone."

With the air of a fine host whose hospitality has been spurned, the turnkey rose.

"Okay, okay," he muttered. "Have it your own way. I was jest trying to be neighbor-like with yuh. If yuh feel any better in the morning, we can have us a little chat. See yuh then!"

Mr. Piff barely heard the clang of the steel door closing behind the turnkey.

He was beyond such minor sensations as hearing and seeing, for his soul was drenched in a torrent of anguish. He was utterly wrapped in his grief.

"Oh my," he groaned softly, "oh my, what will I ever be able to do?"

Subconsciously, as the cheery turnkey made his exit, Mr. Piff's eyes had caught a sheet of white paper sticking out of that gentleman's rear pocket. Subconsciously, his mind had registered and identified the paper. It was a daily racing sheet.

The realization made Mr. Piff groan again. For it had served to bring a fresh surge of remorse sweeping down on him. It had reminded him again of the future into which he had trespassed, the future which had somehow done him dirt.

For Percival Piff, the long night brought no rest. While hour after hour crawled slowly past, he paced back and forth in the narrow confinements of his tiny cell. The realization of his plight grew stronger and stronger upon him, until at last he was certain that he couldn't stand it any longer. He longed for the soothing sound of Matilda's nagging voice, the pleasant obscurity of his unimportant niche in the offices of Hammer, Hammer and Tongs.

Remorse and nostalgia, blending in a subtle pattern, were weaving a cloak of utter despair around Mr. Piff. And there was one sentence which, if repeated once, was repeated a hundred times by the miserable little man in the darkened cell.

It was simply, "I wish I'd never seen the future!"

Morning was long in coming. But being an eventuality, it finally arrived in the form of a bleak gray dawn that seeped in through the bars of Mr. Piff's cell.

Red-eyed and haggard, he stood dejectedly against the bars of his coop, lis-

tening to the sounds of other prisoners waking. Then at last he heard the banging of tin cups and plates, and the odor of coffee wafted subtly to his nostrils. Breakfast was being served.

Breakfast — The thought almost broke him down completely. At that very moment, he could have been rising to coffee, bacon and eggs in his own humble little house. If only he hadn't meddled into the future.

"If," said Mr. Piff bitterly, "if!"

And then the turnkey, the same one who had brought his supper to him the night before, was before his cell. The fellow's face was split in a cherubic grin of greeting, and he carried a cup and a plate in one beefy paw, while the other hand sought for the proper key to unlock Mr. Piff's cell.

"Well," the turnkey began in his cheerful voice, "how is our best guest today?"

MR. PIFF looked at him dully and sighed.

"Fine," he said without enthusiasm, "just fine."

"They ain't gonna question yuh today," the turnkey said when he'd deposited the plate and cup on Mr. Piff's bunk. "Just thought you'd like to know."

Percival Piff felt a sudden surge of hope.

"Have they any leads on who committed the crime?"

"Naw," said the turnkey. "They know you engineered it. That's all they need."

Mr. Piff's hopes deflated like a pricked balloon. He resumed his seat on the cot.

"Oh my," he said, "oh my!"

Suddenly he felt no more resentment for the turnkey. For it occurred to him that the rotund little man was the only friend he had in the world. The only

one, at any rate, who had been decent to him since the start of his troubles. Mr. Piff turned to him.

"I'm sorry about the way I acted, turnkey," he said. "You've been trying to be decent and I didn't appreciate it."

The turnkey colored a modest red.

"Shucks," he said, "just tried to cheer yuh up, that's all. Forget it."

"No," said Mr. Piff, "I appreciate it, and I only wish there was something I could do for you."

"Skip it." The turnkey, blushing, rose to leave. "I have to get around to the other cells, but I'll see you at lunch."

He made his exit, and Mr. Piff heard his heels clacking down the stone corridor before he realized that he had once more noted subconsciously that a copy of the daily racing sheet protruded from the turnkey's hip pocket. With a sudden flash of inspiration, Mr. Piff leaped to his feet. He could repay the kindness of the turnkey. He could give him racing tips for the day!

The turnkey, however, had gone on to other cells. So Mr. Piff was forced to wait until that gentleman came with lunch at noon.

"Look," said Mr. Piff eagerly, when the turnkey brought him in his beans. "Look, I said I wanted to do something to repay your kindness, but I couldn't think of anything. Now I have, and it will help to repay your kindness to me."

The turnkey blushed. "That's all right. Forget it, pal."

"But you don't understand," Mr. Piff protested. "I want to do you a favor. You're the only person who has treated me like a human being, given me a break, since all my troubles began. It's the least I can do, and it will make me feel better inside."

"Okay," said the turnkey, "you win. What is it?"

"Tips," said Mr. Piff eagerly. "I

saw the racing sheet in your pocket. That means you play the horses. I can give you surefire tips. The winners of all the races."

The expectant smile slid slowly off the turnkey's face, and his expression became frigid.

"Oh," he said, "a wise guy, eh?"

"But you don't understand!" Mr. Piff fairly squealed. "I can give you the winning horses. I can give you every race in one-two-three order. I know what ones are going to win today!"

"I suppose," said the turnkey with heavy sarcasm, "that you can tell who's gonna win the Special Handicap in the fourth race at Fairmont."

"Certainly." Mr. Piff nodded in excitement.

"I oughta paste yuh one," growled the turnkey with sudden savagery. "I thought yuh was a nice little guy—in spite of the fact that yuh killed the D. A. But now it turns out that you're jest a tout!"

"No! No!" Mr. Piff was on his feet, pleading for belief. "I can give you the winners. Please believe me!" He paused, searching his memory. "At Fairmont, in the first race, the horses will be Skag, Toby and Come Quick, in that order. The second race will result in Soso, Dotell and By-me, running in that order. The third race will see Tomorrow, Again and Lash Ahead as the first, second and third horses respectively."

THE turnkey was at the cell door, glaring at Mr. Piff.

"Very likely," he snarled, "very likely, indeed. So long, tout!"

Percival Piff slumped down on his cot again, tears starting to his eyes. He had lost his only friend, the only one who was even close to being a friend. No one believed him. No one trusted

P. Piff. The tears ran unashamed down his cheeks. Mr. Piff was getting damned fed up with life. He had looked on it with trusting gaze, and it had given him a swift kick in the posterior quarters.

"I wish," he sobbed aloud, "that I could get out of here!"

Suddenly he took his head from his hands. *Get out*—Why, it was the first time that the thought of escape had occurred to him. He looked wildly about. Could he? Was there any means of breaking out?

But as he looked, his gaze encountered nothing but steel, steel and locks. It was apparently quite impossible.

"No," he began to sob once more. "No, I can't escape. I'm done for. There isn't a chance." He slumped once more on his cot, putting his hands to his face.

In that position, Mr. Piff remained for more than two hours, not moving, a picture of utter dejection, dismal despair. He was broken, beaten, waiting only for the final crushing blow to fall.

CHAPTER VI

The Worm Turns

"HEY!" A voice broke in sharply on Mr. Piff's dulled consciousness. "Hey, Piff!"

He heard a key being hastily inserted in the door to his cell. He looked up to see the turnkey, face red with wild excitement, bursting into his penal crypt.

"Piff!" The turnkey had him by the shoulder, was shaking him. "Piff!"

"Well?" Mr. Piff looked wearily up at him.

"Look, Piff. Gee, I'm sorry! I had yuh wrong, pal. I had yuh wrong an' I'm sorry."

Mr. Piff found the strength to frown.

"What do you mean?"

"Them races, the ones yuh picked," the turnkey panted in breathless urgency. "They all come in like yuh said they would."

Mr. Piff became more alert.

"Did you play them?"

The expression on the turnkey's face was one of acute, dire and devastating remorse.

"No," he confessed hoarsely, "no, I didn't." He gulped twice. "Until it was too late, until the third race was over, I didn't realize that the ones you picked came in."

"That's too bad," said Mr. Piff disinterestedly.

"No, it ain't! I mean, yes, it is—but it ain't, really," the turnkey said quickly. "What I mean is—Well—uh—about that Special Handicap at Fairmont, the fourth race. It ain't started yet. It's due to start in five minutes. That's what I run like the devil from the cigar store down at the corner for. I wanted to ask yuh what the winning horse is gonna be."

"Starts in five minutes?" asked Mr. Piff, faintly concerned.

"Yeah, please! What's the name of that horse?" The turnkey was excited, and the turnkey was in a hurry. He was obviously desperate.

Percival Piff looked at him with mild reproach.

"But you didn't believe me, when I told you before."

"Look." The turnkey almost shouted. "I know I didn't. But I had yuh wrong. I had yuh wrong and I admit it. Now, what's the name of that horse?" He looked at his watch frantically. "Cripes, hurry! There's only four minutes left until post time!"

"Four minutes," said Mr. Piff, "is not very long." An odd expression of cunning crept into his lack-lustre eyes, a gleam of unwonted shrewdness.

"Three minutes," screamed the turnkey, "is all that's left! Look, Piff, fer Gawd's sake! I'm sorry I didn't believe you before. I got a wife and kids, I got a mortgage, and bills and bills and bills!" he wailed. "I *gotta* know the name of that nag. It'll make me a fortune!"

"I don't know," said Percival Piff sadly, "if I should tell you."

"Loooooook," screamed the turnkey, "it's only two minutes until post time! Holy catfish, I can jest make it. Pleeeeeeeeeeassse, Piff!"

Mr. Piff wet his lips, thinking of the fifty-fifty gamble he was counting on. It might work. Play it slow, and it might work. He sighed.

"Weeeeeellll—" he began.

"Pleeeeeeeeeeassssse!" wailed the turnkey. "There's only a minute and a half until post time!"

Mr. Piff let time dangle a moment longer.

"The name," he said finally, "is—"

"Yes?" screamed the frenzied turnkey.

"Cat's Meow," said Mr. Piff. "Cat's Meow."

"Cat's Meow!" bellowed the turnkey. "And a minute left to get my bet down!"

WITH a hoarse gasp, he wheeled on his flat heels and went flying out the cell. A rocket shot from the 1940 model of Big Bertha couldn't have gained such explosive speed in such a short distance.

Mr. Piff smiled. His first smile in many hours. His scheme had worked as planned. The turnkey had been in far too much of a hurry to bother locking the cell door as he left!

Taking a deep breath, and forcing himself to be casual, Mr. Piff stepped calmly from the cell and sauntered down the corridor.

With the exception of several prisoners sleeping soundly in cells farther down the tier, the corridor was deserted. Mr. Piff forced himself to continue his casual saunter. He couldn't run; didn't dare, even though every instinct clamored for him to do so, to dash pell-mell from the place.

The opportunity for escape had presented itself so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that Mr. Piff hadn't had time to debate the issue, hadn't had time to grow frightened over the prospect. But now, as he neared the door leading out to the corridors of the County Building, he breathed a fervent, semi-hysterical prayer that the turnkey had also left that door unlocked.

It was open, and Mr. Piff stepped out into freedom with a deep grateful sigh. In another moment he had slipped quickly down the side hall in which he found himself, and into the main corridor and the ever-moving stream of people. Two minutes more, and he was out on the street.

Freedom!

It was wonderful. Mr. Piff breathed deeply. Even the carbon monoxide odors from passing buses and autos seemed splendid. Suddenly he stopped. The excitement that had been flooding nectar-like through his veins vanished. Vanished to be replaced by fear at a new thought.

"Where can I go?" he asked himself. "Oh my, where can I go?"

It came to Percival Piff at that moment that he had no sanctuary, no place of refuge; and, worse, no money to find one. He was free, yes. But only for the moment. In another five or ten minutes he would be a hunted criminal!

"My house," he thought desperately, "I can hide there."

And at that minute, while he was still less than a block from the County Building, he heard a whistle's screech.

And immediately on its heels there came another, from the County Jail quarters. An utterly terrifying siren started moaning shrilly!

They had discovered his escape already!

All around him people had halted, to turn and stare in excitement at the County Building. The siren was wailing with intensified fury now, and traffic too was halting.

"And they're looking for me!" Mr. Piff thought in terror. "For me!"

"Jail break!" someone near him shouted. "Jail break at the County Building!"

Percival Piff didn't pause to plan any particular scheme of flight. He set his thin shoulders and pushed recklessly through the crowds in the street. There was one thought in his horrified brain—to put all possible distance between himself and the County Building, between himself and the police, between himself and the electric chair.

In a word, Mr. Piff ran like hell.

Which, as it developed a moment later, was not a very bright thing to do.

"Look!" someone screamed, while the siren wailed again. "That little guy, running, must be the escaped prisoner!"

"Stop him, then!" another voice shouted. "Stop that murderer!"

MR. PIFF, his breath scorching his lungs, darted down an alleyway. He could hear footsteps behind him. Footsteps running, gathering speed, gathering volume. The chase was increasing.

"Stop, stop the escaped prisoner! He's a fiend! He killed his mother-in-law and three aunts!"

There was a doorway open off the alley, and without hesitation, Mr. Piff plunged into it. It was a dark dank passageway, but he stumbled onward

for perhaps fifty yards before he slowed down. The sound of the steps behind him was no longer audible. Staring down the far end of the passage, Mr. Piff saw that there was light waiting down there. He started out for it.

A roaring was coming from the end of that passage, where the lights were, and in several more seconds Mr. Piff paused at the entrance to a vast garage. The roaring was coming from a line of trucks less than fifty yards away from him.

At the front entrance to the garage, the doors were opened to permit the trucks to leave, and one of the vehicles was already trundling forward.

Mr. Piff set out swiftly after it, catching hold of the tailgate and swinging onto the rear platform. There were bundles on the rear platform, big white bundles, and Mr. Piff concealed himself behind them while the truck roared out of the garage and into the street.

His heart was hammering wildly against his puny ribs, but Mr. Piff was able to breathe a momentary sigh of relief.

"Gosh," he told himself, wiping the sweat from his long thin nose, "gosh, that was close!"

And just the thought of it forced him to close his eyes and give way to a minute of violent shudders.

From his position on the back of the bouncing vehicle, Mr. Piff peered owlishly out from behind the white bundles occasionally to mark the street intersections they passed. It was a matter of sheer luck that the truck was traveling in the direction of his home. Not directly toward there, of course, but in the general vicinity.

Finally, when the truck slowed for a stop sign in a quiet little residential section, Mr. Piff climbed off and took to the alleys. It was more than an hour later when he drew up within a few

blocks of his bungalow. Now he proceeded with much more caution than before.

"They might have men surrounding the house," he told himself. "They always do in detective stories."

It was still not quite clear to him why he desired to return home at all. Possibly he was acting with the instinct of a small boy running away, who must bid someone a dramatic farewell before doing so. Matilda would serve that purpose. She might even give him some money to carry him far away. He had vague ideas about the Foreign Legion, although he didn't know whether they'd been demobilized by the French now that Hitler had beaten them.

At the end of the block on which he lived, Mr. Piff paused and looked carefully up and down the street. But nothing seemed unusual. There were no men lurking suspiciously about on the lawn, so he moved on.

Choosing to enter by the rear entrance, Mr. Piff found himself on the back porch. The door, fortunately, was slightly ajar, and he pushed into his kitchen.

"Okay, boys, that's Piff!"

The shout turned Percival Piff's blood to ice water, and he wheeled in horror to see men pouring forth from the bushes around his yard. Coming forth and heading for the porch, revolvers drawn.

"Take it easy, men! He's probably armed! He's desperate!"

Percival Piff slammed the door of the kitchen shut and threw home the bolt. Then he turned and gazed wildly around his little kitchen like a cornered rabbit. There was no place he could hide, and though he tried to conceal himself beneath the sink, he had to give the idea up.

"Oh goodness," Mr. Piff wailed. "Goodness me!"

HE scuttled into the living room. The sound of heavy pounding on the front door told him that the place was surrounded.

"Matilda," Mr. Piff squealed, "Matilda!"

But a mocking echo was his only answer. Matilda wasn't home. The hammering on the doors, front and rear, was growing louder, more frightening. Mr. Piff heard a window in the kitchen smash and tinkle on the floor.

He started toward the stairs leading to the upper floor of the house, then stopped. No. That wouldn't do. There was no place to hide up there. The din of hammering came again to his ears, followed by the heavy thump of footsteps landing on the kitchen floor. They were in the house!

There was no other choice open to Mr. Piff, so he dashed to the door leading down to the cellar. He slammed it shut behind him, slid the bolt, and stood there in the darkness, trembling. His hand touched something next to the door. It was his flashlight. The flash he'd nailed there for use in the cellar. He seized it, and in a moment was descending the stairs, guided by the white beam.

The odor of chemicals was once more strong in his nostrils. But it wasn't until he'd taken his second breath of the nostalgic smell that his heart suddenly soared wildly with hope. The fear that had been stamped in his eyes vanished, to be replaced by a new courage, a new determination.

For suddenly, Percival Piff realized he had a fighting chance! He was down the remaining steps in an instant.

The police were pounding on the door of the cellar now. But Mr. Piff wasn't concerned. Instead, he stood beside the Futurescope, playing his flash up and down the front of it.

"Those dials," he said: "I wonder."

Mr. Piff's mind was working at whirlwind speed. Every second was of obvious importance. The time machine had previously been able to throw him a week into the future, then a week back into the present.

Mr. Piff didn't want to get into the future this time, however. What he was concerned with was the past. He knit his brows and bent over the gadgets on the dial board.

There! He had it!

A dial reading "Ahead . . . Back" fell under the white rays of his flash. That was it! The dial was not set at "Ahead." That meant that he could go into the future and return to the present as long as the dial was at that point. But if it were pushed back to read "Back," the reverse should be in order. It would send him into the past and return him to the present when he wished.

The door at the top of the landing was splintering under the pounding impact of chairs wielded by the policemen. Glancing up quickly, to see that they hadn't broken through yet, Mr. Piff returned his concentration to the machine.

"Yes," said Mr. Piff. "Obviously the dial reading 'Back' can send me into the past. And if I'd ever want to, I could return to the present. But I don't think I'll want to."

His hand shoved the dial to "Back." His other hand, still holding the flash, flicked the machine on. The faint humming began immediately. Mr. Piff listened intently. Another smashing blow almost tore the cellar door from its hinges.

Mr. Piff stepped up to the machine. The tingling was suddenly all around him, flooding his tissues with that old familiar feeling. Faintly, as if from a great distance, he could hear the hammering on the door, voices shouting.

The pounding died off, the shouting subsided. The tingling continued. . .

PERCIVAL PIFF stepped away from the machine. Into silence, cold and blessed silence!

He looked down at his feet. Packages were strewn all around him. The machine was still there. A lump came to his scrawny throat as a voice shrilled to his ears, splitting the silence like an ax.

"Percival Piff," the voice screamed, "are you ever going to come upstairs? It shouldn't take you all night to put those packages down there!" Obviously, the voice was Matilda's.

And Mr. Piff was certain, then, that he was right back where he started from—a week in the past. September 3rd.

He gulped, snapped off the machine. His flashlight swung in a wide arc, revealing something leaning against the wall. It was a small sledgehammer.

Mr. Piff walked over to it and removed the cobwebs. He picked up the sledge, looked at the machine.

"The future," he murmured reflectively. He was thinking in a philosophical vein. He knew, as any philosopher does, that the future is predestined merely because man knows nothing of its course, and rushes blindly toward it as a consequence. But should a man be aware of the future—then, obviously, he could alter its course.

Which was exactly what Mr. Piff intended to do with his own future. He was going to alter it in his own way. Beginning with Matilda. And ending up with Hammer, Hammer and Tongs. They'd respect him after this. They'd have to. They'd give him a raise, too. A big one. Otherwise he would go across the street to Rowbottom, Rowbottom and Bilge with twenty years of business secrets in his brain.

With calm resolution, Mr. Piff raised the sledgehammer over his toothpick shoulders and let it ride. The Future-scope disintegrated into smithereens. Then Mr. Piff dropped the sledge and trod resolutely up the stairs to the kitchen.

Matilda stood over the hot stove with a potato masher. She looked angry and flushed. As her husband's small feet stepped lightly into the room, she turned to face him.

"What," demanded Matilda, "have you been up to, you miniature worm? What have you got down in that cellar—some gadget you stole from the kids next door?"

Mr. Piff gulped involuntarily. Matilda had come too close to home for comfort. Standing here in the center of the room, he drew back his pigeon-breasted shoulders.

"Matilda," he began bravely, trying to remember his lines, "your attitude for the past—er—thirty-one years has not been properly respectful. From now on—"

"Ye Gods!" Matilda shrieked. "The man is crazy! I'd better put him out of his misery before he throws a fit!"

And with a wild swing Mr. Piff's spouse flung out the potato masher and beamed Mr. Piff square on the noggin. . .

An hour later: "Percival," Matilda shrieked from the kitchen, "come to supper! If you don't come this instant, I'll jam some castor oil down your throat!"

Mr. Piff shuddered. He removed the icebag from his swollen pate and got up groggily from his bed.

"Yes, my dear," he called back meekly. "I'm coming."

(Continued from page 17)

He felt so buoyed that he chided himself for his foolish fears. "*Remember the odds,*" he recited silently. *No sense worrying Mary with that nonsense about the local trains. Probably a lie, anyway.* The shuffling slap of thousands of feet reassured him as he skipped nimbly off the subwalk and into a branching tunnel. He felt comforted to be so near home again, in familiar corridors.

Standing in line before the express elevator, he checked his watch. He would still make it in time for dinner.

Seventy-five floors by express, then three in the tiny fifty-man local.

He inched forward with the others and stood precisely in the center of his painted square, nodding to a man he recognized, another Ten-level from down the corridor.

Only when the elevator lurched upward did his roving eye fasten on a strange sight. Nozzles dotted the elevator ceiling, and a whitish fog slowly drifted down to settle around his bowed head.

—RICHARD E. PECK

BACK ISSUES S F MAGAZINES

AMAZING and FANTASTIC (1963-1970), S F GREATS, THRILLING S.F., S F ADVENTURE CLASSICS, STRANGE FANTASY, SPACE ADVENTURES, SCIENCE FANTASY, ASTOUNDING S F, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES YEARBOOK—1970, THE STRANGEST STORIES EVER TOLD, SCIENCE FICTION CLASSICS—MOST ISSUES AVAILABLE (60¢). ULTIMATE PUB. CO., BOX 7, OAKLAND GARDENS, FLUSHING, N.Y. 11364.

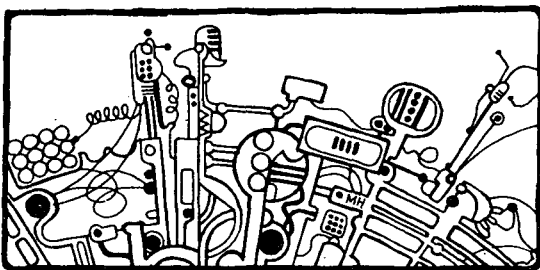
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AMAZING STORIES

the Science

GREG BENFORD

***...in Science
Fiction***



LIFE ON THE MARGIN

Burroughs, Weinbaum, Bradbury, Clarke, Brackett—the list of sf and fantasy writers concerned with Mars is quite long. Many of their visions of lusty battles and exotic creatures amid the red deserts seem hopelessly out-dated now. For a long while sf writers clung to the comfortable Mars of the popular press, crisscrossed by canals and cloaked in a thin but breathable atmosphere.

Stories set on Mars dwindled to a trickle by the mid-60s, though, as our data on the red planet improved. A hostile environment that yields little or no margin is not as tempting a dramatic setting. A few writers continued on but they established no new legends because they could not breathe new fire into their themes. Whenever Mars was used it was often indistinguishable from the older, semi-Earthlike Mars. Zelazny's "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" used a 1935 view of Mars, though it was published in 1963. Writers seemed to relish the austerity of Mars when it wasn't *too* austere; a recurrent theme was the unconscious identification of the clean Spartan desert life with mysticism, from Weinbaum to Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

But even if we have lost the classical Mars, the question of what really is there is still worth asking.

In November of this year a spider-like space probe, Mariner 9, will fire its braking rockets and attempt to establish a stable orbit around Mars. It will circle over the fourth planet at a thousand miles altitude and repeatedly photograph the surface with cameras which can resolve objects as small as two-thirds of a mile in width. Spring will be coming to the martian southern hemisphere and although the Mariner will perform many measurements of interest to several branches of science, the main thrust of its expedition will be the search for life.

Mars is an enigma. Observed from Earth it shows tantalizing signs of life—blue-green patches amid the light red plains. Yet Mariner 4 in 1965 and Mariners 6 and 7 in 1969 all sent back photographs of a Mars that seemed bleak indeed: a chilly, cratered terrain with a thin, dry and unbreathable atmosphere. The two pictures have yet to be entirely resolved.

The question of life on Mars probably will turn upon the nature of the martian *maria*, or seas. Just as was the

case with our moon, men first thought these dark patches on the martian disk were oceans. Early observers of Mars, believing this, tried to catch reflections of the sun in the martian maria and were sorely disappointed. Their detailed observations of these brown spots brought to light other, more interesting facets, though. They noted that the maria became blue-green in spring and turned brownish and then dull gray in late summer and fall. What could this be but plant life?

The famous American astronomer Percival Lowell held this view and extended it with his theory of the martian canals. Schiaparelli, an Italian astronomer of the 1870s, first saw these thin lines etched on the face of Mars and called them *canali*, meaning channels in Italian. Unfortunately, the similar English word *canals* implies an artificial waterway. This led to some lively, uninformed public speculation about martian civilizations. In the early 1900s Lowell popularized his view of a desert planet whose oceans had gradually evaporated into space. This left a desperate race of intelligent beings to parcel out the remaining water, stored in the north and south poles. The "canals," Lowell said, were in fact the green belts of vegetation, several hundred miles wide, fed by an intricate irrigation system.

The years have not been kind to this theory. Gradually, as better measurements and observations were made, it became apparent that the martian atmosphere is thin and dry. Deadly ultraviolet radiation bombards the surface and the nights are fiercely cold. Higher forms of life could hardly survive under such conditions.

Still, the notion of widespread plant

life lingered on. It was dealt a stunning blow by the photographs of Mariner 4 in 1965. These famous pictures revealed a bleak cratered landscape with no signs of canals or any sort of water erosion. The martian air proved to be nearly all carbon dioxide, with little oxygen or water. What's more, this blanket of carbon dioxide is a hundred times thinner than our air. This means it cannot retain heat through the martian night or shield against incoming radiation.

Mariners 6 and 7 confirmed these harsh conditions in 1969 shortly after man's first landing on the moon. They gave good evidence that the poles are mostly carbon dioxide ice ("dry ice"), not water. However, their 201 photographs also showed a martian desert in which craters have been completely eroded away, perhaps indicating some form of geological activity. This and a large "slump" or settling found in the southern hemisphere indicate that Mars is not a totally dead planet, at least geologically. Vulcanism may still be going on there. As we shall see, this may be an important point.

Mariners 4, 6 and 7 were flyby craft, unable to snatch more than a few hours' glimpse of Mars. Mariner 8 was a failure. Mariner 9 will orbit Mars and should remain in working order for ninety days. Such a long survey during the southern hemisphere's spring and summer should be able to shed much more light on the question of whether Mars could hold life as we know it.

The search for extraterrestrial life is the greatest detective story of this century, but we must be careful to watch for hidden assumptions in our thinking. That phrase—*life as we know it*—often means only *life as I am familiar with*

it. Study of Mars has steadily whittled away at the chances that ordinary Earthly plants could live there. No one doubts that a rhododendron bush would have a rough time of it on the red planet. But various odd and obscure forms of life which flourish all around us might not find Mars so hostile a piece of real estate.

Consider Earth. Here we are enveloped by air that is twenty per cent oxygen, yet some bacterial colonies carry on a healthy life without it. They do not use oxygen at all.

These anaerobic bacteria instead draw their energy from chemical reactions that produce "food" (organic matter) by combining sulfur or nitrogen compounds with ordinary carbon dioxide. This is a perfectly legitimate way to live; bacteria in the muddy bottoms of lakes use sulfur compounds in just this way. True, these reactions are not popular because oxygen-using systems are much more efficient. Oxygen breathers use processes which yield more energy per reaction and thus through natural selection have come to be preferred on a world where oxygen is plentiful. Anaerobic life is found only where oxygen is excluded, such as in deep oil wells or in stagnant bodies of water.

It seems possible that our anaerobic cousins could survive under martian conditions of oxygen deprivation, though because of their inefficient energy-producing reactions they would grow very slowly. Still, without the competition of oxygen-users, anaerobic life forms could probably evolve far further than they have on Earth; they need not remain simple bacteria.

Of course, it may not be necessary for our hypothetical martian plants to

give up oxygen reactions altogether. Our old friend, photosynthesis, will still work on Mars. This chemical reaction brings together carbon dioxide, water and sunlight to make sugar and oxygen. Chlorophyll's bright green is the signature of this process. On Earth plants live by photosynthesis, breathing the oxygen into the air. On Mars they might instead capture this vital gas in the intercellular air spaces of their stems or leaves. The oxygen saved could then be exchanged with some other form of plant in a simple life cycle.

This is one area where the martian atmosphere is of some help—it provides more carbon dioxide than does Earth's. This would speed photosynthesis and provide ample carbon for a carbon-based biology.

The other essential element for photosynthesis, ordinary sunlight, is a mixed blessing on Mars. There is surely enough for photosynthesis to proceed—Mars is 1.52 times as far from the sun as Earth and gets about forty percent as much sunlight—but a lot of undesirable radiation comes along with it. At the surface of Mars the atmospheric pressure is equivalent to that eighteen miles above sea level on Earth. Such a thin atmosphere cannot stop the sun's ultraviolet and X-ray radiation, as Earth's does. Our current knowledge of the effects such radiation has on plant life is rather limited, but it indicates that martian levels may be fatal.

We should remember, though, that prolonged exposure to the sun is not necessary. Life with a low metabolic rate can live with only a few minutes of meager sunlight each day. On Mars a plant could avoid the sun's rays for

most of the day by curling up into a ball. The notion of a plant that unrolls its leaves for only a few moments each day is unusual but not absurd. In fact, the plant need not be so agile: If it grew in the partial shelter of a crater rim or near the entrance to caves or fissures, sunlight would fall on it only a small part of the day. One can even imagine some life form—say, a moss or lichen—which could grow a tough turtle-like shell over most of itself for a sun shield. Whatever method for avoiding the sun works best, a good portion of any martian ecology will probably lie safely underground.

Unfortunately, this isn't the only trouble struggling life forms will have in a thin atmosphere. Mars' blanket of carbon dioxide cannot hold heat through the night, so at the equator temperatures plunge from a comfortable 65 degrees Fahrenheit at high noon, to a frigid one hundred degrees below zero at night.

Could any life survive such extremes? The martian day is 37 minutes longer than our own so the hearty native plants must be prepared for a full eight hours of (by our standards) truly intolerable cold. The lowest temperature on Earth at which life is known to grow and reproduce is minus eleven degrees Fahrenheit. (These are speck-sized bacterial colonies found in salt water solutions in Antarctica.) It seems unlikely that anything can thrive below this level.

But martian life needn't function through the long night, carrying on its metabolism in a business-as-usual fashion. It can hibernate, just as many terrestrial organisms do. Our own earthly bacteria are incredibly rugged this way; the normal commercial

method for shipping colonies of bacteria is by freeze-drying them.

Spores as well as some hearty bacteria can survive temperatures close to absolute zero. Some plants are known to trap heat inside themselves by varying their pigmentation and are thus able to survive through long chill desert nights. As a bit of speculation, why couldn't a plant develop its own antifreeze? Some earthly plants produce compounds of the same general class as organic antifreezes and it is not too much of a leap to imagine that martian ones could distribute the fluid through their stems to ward off the chill. A small amount of such a chemical could keep cellular pockets of water from freezing and rupturing the cell walls.

Retention of water may be the crucial point, too, for water is the vital factor in the formation of life. Earth's varied lifeforms evolved in the early oceans about three billion years ago. Most biologists feel that flowing water is an absolutely essential ingredient in creating the organic "soup" from which living organisms can spring. But if Mars ever had oceans or lakes they vanished long ago. Gradually any water left in the martian atmosphere has diffused away into space or frozen out at the poles. -

These potential reservoirs of water, the brilliant white poles, have become the subject of much controversy. The Mariners discovered that the poles are mostly dry ice. They do not seem to be more than a few yards thick, since we can see the gray crater rims jutting up through the ice. Water ice may be intermingled with the dry ice in significant amounts and might possibly be a factor in explaining one of the great

mysteries of Mars: the "wave of darkening."

Earthbound astronomers have seen this phenomenon repeatedly with each new martian spring. The already brownish areas of Mars—the maria and canals—seem to turn darker and sometimes greener. In the southern hemisphere the effect is quite pronounced. As spring comes the darkening spreads out from the pole. The spreading is not uniform, though; the red deserts whiten, as though frost were forming on them. This agrees with the generally accepted hypothesis that the deserts are high cool plateaus, where frost would most readily "stick." Simultaneously, the maria and canals darken progressively toward the equator. Some astronomers have long believed this wave represents the spreading of water which has been released from the pole by the melting sun. They reason that moist soil is darker and that the relatively humid winds that may blow from the pole could leave a modest deposit of moisture in the soil.

Other theories exist, however. Some feel that the weak martian winds may blow fine trains of dust alternately back and forth across these areas, so that they appear to darken seasonally. If so, though, why do the deserts whiten at the same time? Transfer of one color of dust alone could not explain both events.

If the wave of darkening does indeed come from a dispersal of water vapor, this does not by any means imply a martian summer with ponds and lakes. Bodies of pure water such as pools or streams cannot exist at all on the martian surface because the atmospheric pressure there is so low. The water evaporates away, instead. This is only

so for pure water, though. Water with impurities, such as ordinary salt, does not evaporate quite so quickly. A puddle of thick brine might persist indefinitely in the dessicated surroundings.

Such unlikely and forbidding habitats aren't necessary for life to take hold, however. The central problem any life will have on Mars is collecting and holding onto its water, but an enterprising plant need not resort to convenient briny ponds. Moisture will remain indefinitely if it condenses into small cracks and holes in the soil and is partially absorbed. The wave of darkening may be caused by widespread absorption of the precious frost that is borne from the poles on light spring winds. Some of the frost may well be dry ice, at least where we observe it on the red highlands. If water comes from the poles seasonally as well it will darken the soil in the warmer regions of the planet. Its arrival could revive dormant spores or plants. Such living things could gain the necessities of life by sucking dry the soil around them and storing the water in their tissues.

Life would be hard for them. They would be forced to mine the martian soil for their food, including nitrogen and sulfur if they do not use oxygen. Dim sunlight would kindle the complicated photosynthesis chain in them, but they dare not remain exposed too long for fear of radiation damage from ultraviolet and X-rays. Add to this the necessity for regular hibernations and such an existence seems bleak indeed.

Of course, this picture is very Earth-centered. Harsh conditions to us may not be so difficult for an adaptable microbe. Bacteria reproduce about every half hour, allowing them to mutate quickly and adapt to new circum-

stances. If only a tiny fraction of a bacterial colony can survive and reproduce for a day, chances are good that they will be around for the indefinite future. This makes them true cosmopolitans, able to spread and thrive where other, more sophisticated life forms perish.

If microorganisms live on Mars it becomes conceivable that higher forms have evolved from them. The pioneer bacteria, if they ever were born on Mars, could pave the way for later forms by changing the soil and atmosphere of the planet. Humus would slowly collect, making the soil more fertile. Small bacterial colonies could begin to breathe needed gases (such as nitrogen) into the martian air or store it in the soil. This is the way we envision the earliest steps life took on our own planet, so they are not totally out of line for Mars.

But we have overlooked one point. The ladder of life began on Earth in the seas. Mars plainly has none. Did it ever?

If it did certainly the oceans did not last very long. The Mariner probes showed little erosion that could be attributed to water. Still, it is not impossible to imagine that shallow seas did once form in the very early days of the planet. They might not have had time to cause significant erosion—remember that on a planet with only one third of Earth's gravity, the wearing effect of falling water would be only one third as important.

These early seas would have evaporated quickly. The central question is whether they would have frozen before the evaporation was complete. If so, great sheets of ice once stretched across the face of Mars. Gradually dust

would have blown over them and finally buried the ice beneath the surface we now see.

This "frozen ocean theory" is pure speculation, but it does not contradict anything we know and it leads to some interesting conclusions. The buried ice sheets could become a source of water for life forms near the surface, if some process gradually melted parts of the sheet and moved the water upward. Two things could do this—hot volcanic magma from below or occasional meteorites from above.

Mars probably has some low level of volcanic activity, as well as Marsquakes. The "slump" found by Mariners 6 and 7 in the southern hemisphere supports this assumption. Periodic disturbances would carry water to the surface where it can disperse, perhaps even forming clouds. (For decades observers have reported white clouds over the maria which lasted several days.) A slow seepage of water to the dessicated plains above would gradually raise the soil humidity around the region. It could even nurse primitive vegetation with warmth and water. Such areas, darker than the deserts, may be what Earthbound astronomers identify as the maria.

In the slow geological processes of Mars fissures, fault lines and cracks would form. Chains of volcanoes might arise as they have on Earth. The process would be aided by meteor impacts which open great fractures and cracks in the crust. The heat generated by such collisions would melt subsurface ice and allow the steam and water to escape through the cracks.

A full-fledged asteroid which fell on Mars would have enormous effect. Near the impact heat would be re-

tained beneath the surface for very long times, percolating water upward, and the soil would darken from the released humidity. The long fissures and fault lines spreading radially outward from the impact crater would also show darkening of the nearby soil. These may be what we see as the famous martian canals.

If the canals are simply coloration near an ancient fault line, perhaps this is why the Mariners, with limited color resolution, failed to find them.

The chain of supposition here is tenuous and may quite easily prove wrong at some vital point. Still, it does provide a consistent interpretation of the changes men have closely watched on the martian surface for over a century.

Even if Mars retains some subsurface water, the planet may still be barren and lifeless. The dark maria and canals may only represent the image of the underground ice beds, projected on the surface by soil humidity. Life might still find such a bitter environment too much. After all, even if life arose in the hypothetical ancient seas of Mars it may not have made the difficult transition to a dry, cold ecology.

It is just barely possible, though, that oceans themselves are not necessary for the formation of life. Recently Drs. Horowitz, Hubbard and Hardy at the California Institute of Technology's Jet Propulsion Laboratory subjected a mixture of gases to ultraviolet radiation in conditions like those we believe exist at the martian surface. They found that organic compounds were produced. The compounds are life-related in that a similar process is thought to have occurred on Earth at the beginning of evolution.

However, these organic products must in turn be protected against ultimate destruction by the same ultraviolet radiation which formed them. This means newborn molecules must be buried by dust or blown into tiny crevices, to avoid the deadly sting of the sun. If this does not happen in just the right way life-producing processes cannot go on.

Whether this danger and all the other barriers against life on Mars—cold, dryness, thin atmosphere—have been surmounted by nature is impossible to estimate. The fact that organic matter can arise on the surface without an ocean is a definite plus, though it only increases the possibility of life on Mars from "very unlikely to unlikely," says Dr. Horowitz.

The Mariner orbiter which makes its rendezvous with Mars this November may decide the question. The mysterious canals and maria will be undergoing the seasonal wave of darkening as the Mariner arrives. If all goes well our emissary to the fourth planet will have at least three operational months to watch and measure. It may be able to tell us a great deal about the subtle quickening of spring on Mars.

It seems likely, though, that even if the existence of the wave of darkening is verified by the Mariner, its observations may not be able to tell us if the effect arises from moistening of the soil or the blooming of some primitive lichen or moss, or both.

This crucial point will probably wait for a decision when the first of NASA's Viking Landers settles on the martian surface in 1976. Even then the forms of life on Mars might be so small and unusual by Earthly standards that the simple experiments onboard the Viking

craft could not decide the issue with certainty.

In the final analysis perhaps only men on the spot can be sure that no life exists on Mars. A manned expedition to Mars will probably not occur

(Continued from page 79)

map with a total-conversion reaction!")

But the sign of the alien ship was reversed. What lay under his hand was the story of the evolution of man—not a threat that he would be driven back to the caves, but a promise that he would travel to the stars! He turned the pictures up one by one, like tarot cards: the caveman with his stone axe; the discovery of fire; that baffling plain disc, which now he realised was symbolic of the invention of the wheel, *not* the Earth wrapped in smoke and fall-out; the release of nuclear power; the rocket, the first crude spaceship; the view of Earth as the astronauts and cosmonauts saw it when they made their earliest voyages; the far-distant view of the sun from the orbit of Pluto; the contact made with the unthinkable, incredible, inconceivable ship from the far side of the four-dimensional curve of the cosmos, where matter was anti-matter and time's arrow faced the other way . . . and last of all that wonderful sight which some man might one day contemplate: the whole galaxy, turning like a whirlpool of stars.

Might?

Would. That was the most astonishing thing of all. It might take centuries to work out the philosophical implications of the last conclusion to be drawn from this inverted exponential curve of achievement, but for the time being he at least, Vassily Sheklov, was content to accept it with the force of a poetic or religious truth.

until at least the middle 1980s. And if the answer sent back by either the Viking or an astronaut is finally positive, then a great adventure will have begun.

—GREGORY BENFORD

We're going to make it.

Because this alien species could not have learned what—as the pictures proved—they knew about mankind from this meeting: the naked form of a primitive man, above all, waving a flint axe. It followed that they, in their past, had already grown familiar with human beings, in what was still the latter's future. This encounter, the first for man, was for the aliens the last.

No use. It turned his brain topsy-turvy to try and think about it. Leave it to the genius speculators, leave it to the philosophers and cosmogonists and metaphysicians. Right now, the problem was to try and convey some of his sense of certainty to people that Bratcheslavsky had dismissed as "merely efficient." How wonderful to know that the human race was not after all going to be destroyed because aliens triggered its own horrible armoury of murder—and how terrifying to know that it rested on his shoulders to convince the world . . .

For a brief instant he felt he knew exactly why Danty had chosen to destroy himself. And then there was a knock at the door, and someone was standing there, and the someone was saying, "The First Secretary and the Chinese Ambassador are waiting to receive you, so if you will come with me . . ."

—JOHN BRUNNER

the Future in Books



Stanislaw Lem: *SOLARIS*. Walker & Co., New York, 1970. Hardcover, 204 pages; 12 pp afterword by Darko Suvin; \$4.95.

This book represents a new force in science fiction. It comes from Poland, and in several ways it strikes an American reader as being truly a maverick conception. Scrutinized superficially, it might seem to be filled with moments of great interest interspersed with long stretches of abstraction, discussion, contemplation, speculation—things which American and British science fiction outgrew in favor of more realistic modes of human interaction years ago.

A more open mind and a more careful reading, however, might convince one that Stanislaw Lem writes from a different, but equally good, set of stylistic and storytelling premises than those which we are currently bickering about here in the English-speaking science-fiction homeland. It is my belief that this latter interpretation of Lem is the fairer and more accurate one. He is not a writer to everyone's taste, surely, but those people who do not like his writings could benefit by reading at least some of them.

Propriety and fashion in the writing and criticising of science fiction is still a rather rigid thing. It has not yet participated in the kind of freeing-from-tradition cataclysm-and-rebirth process which has simultaneously shaken the more established

forms of literature and art such as mainstream literature, poetry, music, film, painting, sculpture, and theater. In these other areas, experiment is almost passé; while in science fiction it is normally only threatened—it hasn't really arrived yet as a fact of life.

Lem is not a young firebrand, nor is he an iconoclast. Despite the originality of his ideas and of his writing, he exists within the Eastern European tradition of literature and art, or so it seems to me from my vantage point outside that tradition.

Lem's images; his unwillingness to pay attention to common Western-European and American concepts of banality, subtlety, etc.; his humor; the flow of narrative—all of these aspects of *Solaris* and of the other stories I have read seem to me to be quite reminiscent of the Polish and Czech films I have seen. They share an attitude with those films which they do not share with English-language science fiction.

Presume, then, that Lem writes somewhat within the Eastern European tradition. It features a different set of rules about what constitutes a trite plot sequence, a hackneyed idea, a tiresome device, etc. Lem therefore uses ideas, plots, characterizations, etc., which no American or English writer worthy of his magazine and paperback collection would dare to scrape together. Lem, perhaps, has read enough American and British science fic-

tion to be aware of these "Do's," and "Don'ts," but having lived outside the English-language environment of taboos, he feels freer to ignore them.

Examples are in order: Take the basic plot ploy of *Solaris*, for example. A mission to a planet is in constant trouble. The ocean on the planet is apparently alive and intelligent. Studies have been made of this phenomenon for many years. Someone goes to check up on recent difficulties and gets into similar difficulties himself. The confrontation between the "everyman" protagonist/narrator and the "omniscient," or nearly omniscient, planet provide a vehicle for Lem's philosophical preachings and his wry observations.

The idea of an extremely intelligent non-earthly intelligence is one which our own authors know to tackle only with care. Recent examples are Dick's *Galactic Pot Healer* and slightly before that, Hoyle's *Black Cloud*. Lem does not pay any attention to the care which Dick took and which Hoyle failed to take, however. He plunges into *Solaris* as if the body of science fiction previous to *Solaris* had never existed. Being to some extent a genuine alien from our literary tradition, he gets away with it. Just as Japanese Noh music "gets away" with things which are banal or forbidden or uninteresting in rock music or Western classical music, so Lem "gets away" with his seeming audacities.

More personal than the audacities, and correspondingly less the result of Lem's membership in a literary tradition foreign to our own, there is the tendency he has to insert long and intricate philosophical discussions into his narratives. This practice has come recently into considerable disrepute in American science fiction, because it has long characterized the writing technique of an author who cannot manage to describe an idea within the natural unfolding of events in his story.

In Lem's case, however, the very central nature of the story is overtly philosophical. When Lem's hero, Kelvin, finds the basic premises of his existence questioned, then he naturally begins to think about those basic philosophical questions which seem to be so floridly self-indulgent to those of us who fancy ourselves to be scornful of over-theoretical daydreaming. Again, Lem cuts through our unexamined bonds of fashion and stylistic taboo.

Solaris' one important point of imperfection is in the texture of language. I cannot imagine that a story which contains the ideas, turns of narrative, and overall conception of *Solaris* could have been written in Polish with a surface as un-distinctive as that in the English translation. Being unable to function as a translator from any language into English at present, I am reluctant to offer this criticism of Joanna Kilmartin and Steven Cox, but I do. Their work in rendering Lem's Polish (by way of intermediate translation into some other tongue, perhaps) eventually into English does have the important virtue of naturalness; it flows with ease. It seems often to lack an idiosyncrasy or individualism of texture which I suspect was present in the Polish original. Is there some way of remedying this, I wonder? Not every translating job will find a translator so sympathetic to the original as Baudelaire is said to have been for Poe, but I hope that future translators of Lem into English will retain Cox/Kilmartin's idiomatic naturalness while combining it with whatever subtle individuality of texture Lem seems bound to have put into each sentence in the original.

In sum, Lem's *Solaris* is unique, at least for now. In the body of existing science fiction, it functions something like a wildcard. Perhaps its eventual influence upon science fiction as a whole will be that it introduced a new outside force. I suspect

that Lem will come to function eventually as an influence upon some writers not unlike the influence of Jorge Luis Borges. Lem admires Borges' work, though it is extremely different from his own. If you wish to wrap your intellect about a difficult but rewarding maverick book, buy *Solaris*. I like it very much.

—Stephen Allen Whealton

Frederick Siemon: SCIENCE FICTION
STORY INDEX 1950-1968. American
Library Association, Chicago, 1971.
Paper, 288 pages; \$3.95.

The publishers of this book say it is "an invaluable aid to the devoted science fiction fan as well as to the librarian," and that "since this index is intended as a practical guide, it concentrates on approximately 90 percent of all science fiction anthologies published in the United States and England, excluding only those few published in such small quantities as to be practically unavailable from any source," and that it is "the most comprehensive and definitive guide to science fiction, a very important addition to any library serving the science fiction fan." They say lots of things. They say, "*Science Fiction Story Index* gives unprecedented professional treatment to anthologies published from 1950 through 1968. This new index covers more anthologies than any other science fiction index. It includes 3,400 titles and provides complete indexing. These features top all other science fiction indexes."

Don't believe a word of any of this. It's all bushwah. There—I said it nicely. I didn't think I could.

What this book actually is is a key to those 350-some science fiction anthologies and single author collections that Mr. Siemon has been able to identify in general reference sources such as Cumulative Book Index and then locate. In other words, Mr.

Siemon doesn't know a damned thing about science fiction at first hand. He is neither fan nor scholar. He has depended on his fallible identification of CBI's fallible listings. He is content to dismiss as too unimportant for consideration all the many books he can't recognize, or that he cannot locate, or that were published before his secondary sources began to list science fiction (which is the reason for his arbitrary starting point), or that his secondary sources themselves overlook. That's a lot of books. The result is a half-assed index.

Here, restricting myself to one book per author, are a few of the single-author collections omitted: *Starburst* (Bester), *The Seedling Stars* (Blish), *Far and Away* (Boucher), *The October Country* (Bradbury), *Honeymoon in Hell* (Brown), *Cloak of Aesir* (Campbell), *Tales from the White Hart* (Clarke), *Sprague de Camp's New Anthology*, *Ellison Wonderland*, *Revolt in 2100* (Heinlein), *No Boundaries* (Kuttner and Moore), *The Wonder Effect* (Pohl and Kornbluth), *Untouched by Human Hands* (Sheckley), *You Will Never Be the Same* (Smith), *Caviar* (Sturgeon), *The Human Angle* (Tenn), *Away and Beyond* (van Vogt), and *Four for Tomorrow* (Zelazny).

Again, restricting myself to one book per editor, here are a few of the anthologies omitted: *Penguin Science Fiction* (Aldiss), *The Best Science Fiction Stories: 1954* (Bleiler and Dikty), *Timeless Stories for Today and Tomorrow* (Bradbury), *New Worlds of Fantasy* (Carr), *Crossroads in Time* (Conklin), *Dangerous Visions* (Ellison), *The Shape of Things* (Knight), *Three Times Infinity* (Margulies), *Galaxy of Ghouls* (Merril), *Star Science Fiction Stories #4* (Pohl), *Witches Three* (Pratt), *Men and Machines* (Silverberg), and *Tales of Outer Space* (Wollheim).

However, the index attempts to make up for these omissions by listing *Childhood's End* and *More Than Human* as

collections. (Did Siemon *look* at these books?)

In addition to being incomplete before it starts, this *Science Fiction Story Index* is short on the information that it does give. It has three sections. First is an author-title listing, with a cross-reference from each story to an anthology code. Second is a bibliography which translates each anthology code into a book title. Third is a story title listing with a cross-reference to the author's name. What all this means is that if you know only a story title, you must look in at least three different places in the book in order to discover where it has been published.

There are no table-of-contents listings. If you want to know which stories are in a particular book, tough. If you think you remember "Life-Line" being in Heinlein's *The Man Who Sold the Moon*, but you can't find it here, double tough. Siemon indexes the paperback edition, which is abridged, instead of the hardcover, which he has never heard of. (He also dates the pb to 1963 instead of 1951, but why quibble about trivialities?) There is no note of place of original publication. If you want to know where a story first appeared, you won't find it out here.

A few pseudonyms are listed. For instance, you can discover that "Mark Twain" is the pseudonym of S. L. Clemens. You can also learn that Robert Willey is the pseudonym of Willy Ley and that W. Norbert is the pseudonym of Norbert Weiner. You won't find any stories listed under those pen-names, however. Rather more important, you will not discover in this book that Anson MacDonald and Lyle

Monroe are pseudonyms of Robert Heinlein, or that Lewis Padgett is the pseudonym of Henry Kuttner. And this is information you might actually want to know. By anything you are told here, you might assume that "By His Bootstraps" by Heinlein and "By His Bootstraps" by MacDonald are as much separate stories as "Franchise" by Asimov and "Franchise" by Neville. And you might think that Gerald Heard and Henry Fitz-Gerald Heard were two different people. Tough again, children.

In his introduction, Mr. Siemon says, "What about other relevant reference works? There are several, some still in print that attempt to offer an author-title approach to science fiction literature. In the main they reflect the approach used by nonlibrarians, being almost too specific and giving too much information." He fails to name any of these books or to state in what regard they give "too much information." (Gah!) As an ex-librarian, let me offer my opinion that Mr. Siemon is an arrogant ninny and his book is incompetent, and since he fails to name any alternatives, I will. He might have done well to acquaint himself with W. R. Cole's *A Checklist of Science Fiction Anthologies* and Donald H. Tuck's *A Handbook of Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Where they overlap with his book, they are unfailingly superior. A third edition of the Tuck in three volumes is in process from Advent. I recommend it as a work of love and scholarship.

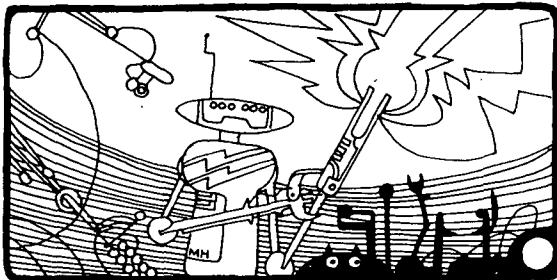
As for the *Science Fiction Story Index*, it isn't worth the death of a single tree.

—Alexei Panshin

ON SALE NOW IN DECEMBER FANTASTIC

A Special GUILFORD CONFERENCE WRITERS ISSUE containing the following stories: THINGS ARE TOUGH ALL OVER, by Ted White. THE AWESOME MENACE OF THE POLARIZER, by Geo. Alec Effinger. GARDEN OF EDEN, by Jack C. Haldeman II. CARTOON by Jack M. Dann. WIRES by Gardner R. Dozois, the conclusion of THE DRAMATURGES OF YAN by John Brunner, and S F IN DIMENSION by Alexei Panshin.

...OR SO YOU SAY



Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet of paper, and addressed to: Or So You Say, P.O. Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.

Dear Ted,

I just have to congratulate James Tiptree Jr. for his story, "The Peacefulness of Vivyan." It's one of the best science fiction stories I've read recently, and probably *the* best short story published in *AMAZING* under your editorship. James Tiptree is a writer I shall watch from now on, to see what masterpiece he produces next. I only hope "The Peacefulness of Vivyan" is remembered when award time comes around; it deserves a nomination, at least.

The other short stories are ok, though they aren't too impressive after reading Tiptree's story. But the only one I would really object to is William Nolan's "The Worlds of Monty Willson," which seems a bit too gimmick-ish to me.

"The Science in Science Fiction" column is rather interesting this time—more so than usual, I think. The background in a science fiction novel is usually rather important, since that is what gives the story its flavor and color; in fact, it's probably the only thing that distinguishes a sf story from its mainstream brethren. Greg Benford does a fine job of detailing the sort of care and attention that should

be lavished on a story's background and scientific framework; maybe the article will help lead to better science fiction in the future.

The interior artwork in this issue is a giant improvement over most of that in your May issue. Everyone's stuff seems to have improved, Mike Kaluta's especially. (And of course, your new format certainly helps . . .) The only thing I'm not really satisfied with is the cover; it seems rather bland, without much exciting color contrast or anything. (Dan Adkins can do much better than this!) And now I'm wondering if your engraver decided to fool around with your cover again . . .

Isn't it a strange world? I have a hard time finding a copy of *AMAZING* in any of the local stores around here, but somehow Milton Moshe Feder picks up a copy of it in *Israel* (!). It isn't that your distributor isn't reaching my area, however; I see stacks and stacks of your publisher's reprint magazines on the newsstands. Last time I looked there were five different varieties (all current) of these magazines laying on the stands. But no *FANTASTIC* . . . or *AMAZING!* Strange as it would seem, I think your own reprint magazines are pushing *AMAZING* and *FANTASTIC* off the stands here. There obviously isn't room to display all of the titles, so a lot of potential readers aren't finding out about your new mags. A pity. And I'm afraid that a diet of *THRILLING SCIENCE FIC-*

TION, SPACE ADVENTURES, etc., won't exactly prepare an sf reader for AMAZING when he does see it. . . .

Cy Chauvin

17829 Peters

Roseville, Michigan 48066

You'll be pleased to know we have another story by James Tiptree Jr.—whose work I regard as highly as you do—forthcoming soon. —TW

Dear Ted,

With the new printers, AMAZING's outward appearance seems to be improving. The September cover was quite good and somewhat eye-catching. On to the issue itself. I haven't as yet finished "The Second Trip," but it does appear to be one of the better novels you've printed in the past few years. The short works weren't up to par this time around, with the exception of Bob Shaw's "What Time Do You Call This?" The reprint wasn't as good as some in the past, "Myrra" seemed to suffer from lack of substance, and your story didn't really appeal to me. I would like to see you do something along the lines of your excellent short novel, "It Could Be Anywhere" back in the October 1969 issue of FANTASTIC. The book reviews were good but I prefer *Clubhouse*. It seems you're really suffering from lack of space as far as your features go. I'd still like to see an elongated *Clubhouse* each issue with more than just fanzine reviews but also a look at fandom itself. Something along the lines of Rog Phillip's old *Clubhouse* for AMAZING.

Well, no matter. AMAZING seems to have established itself as the fine zine it is and is my personal favorite of all of today's prozines.

Jim D. Lilliefors

13914 Marianna Dr.

Rockville, Md., 20853

We'd planned on a Clubhouse column this issue—guest-written by Terry Carr (John

Berry is still in Europe)—but, as I mentioned in the editorial, Terry has had other problems on his mind, compounded by his move to the San Francisco Bay Area. Maybe next issue . . . In the meantime, The Future in Books fills in. I haven't written anything like "It Could Be Anywhere" in years, I'm afraid, but you might try to find a copy of the book from which it was adapted, Jewels of Elsewhen, published by Belmont in 1967, and according to its publisher no longer in print. —TW

To the editors & all S.F. fans,

I have been insulted and demand to know why filthy pornography has invaded the pages of AMAZING.

I am not a prude, but the September issue of AMAZING has reached a new low.

To R. Silverberg, if this is the best you can do, DON'T!!!

Having missed several years of AMAZING, I can say that I haven't missed much, if such filth has been in your past issues.

The Second Trip belongs in the bottom of an old fashioned outhouse!!!!

Henry W. Harris (CSC USN. RET)

3490 E. 9th Ave.

Anchorage, Alaska 99508

P.S. I don't think that I will see an answer to this . . . [See below.—TW]

Dear Sir:

I started reading AMAZING STORIES Magazine with Volume 1, Number 1, and have read every issue since then. When my subscription ends next month I will not renew it.

AMAZING STORIES Magazine is not a Pornographic Magazine, but some of the stories ARE too pornographic for me.

One of the minor dirty stories (for instance) was "Junk Patrol" (Vol. 45, No. 3). It was an excellent science fiction story, but the four "gutter" words in it were absolutely unnecessary. Decent people do not like to read such words.

The worst story and very pornographic, was in Volume 45, Number 2 and 3. It was the 127 page too long "The Second Trip" by Robert Silverberg.

Part 1 had 91 "gutter" words, profanity, nudity and pornographic descriptions and part 2 had 83 (total, 174). The pornographic parts were the sex act minute details several times, one "gutter" word that was used many, many times and the author's favorite "gutter" word used several dozen times. *ALL* were unnecessary, added *nothing* to the story and could have been substituted by clean words.

Decent people are not interested in reading such filthy junk. I believe there is something wrong with a person who writes such dirty stories, and even more so the persons who have them printed.

Goodbye,

Geo. C. Brown

1035 So. Highland Ave.

Los Angeles, Calif., 90019

I tell you what: When "decent" people stop using "gutter" words in their conversations in everyday life, those of us who write filthy junk in an attempt to tell better, more realistic stories, will cease our efforts in that direction. But I must warn you: history suggests it will be a long wait indeed. In the meantime, hasn't a "decent" person such as yourself better things to do than to count every single "gutter" word in a 127-page story? -TW

Mr. White:

Things aren't going too well, are they? SF magazines are in a general slump, the circulation of your two magazines are down, pages have been cut, etc. You have attributed many reasons for the bad luck: the recession, poor distribution, evil spirits, and the like. Now I would like to add another to your files: the titles of your magazines.

Consider the following: (1) many people who read this magazine are merely passing

through; they are not hard core fans; (2) many of these same people will often judge a book by its cover; (3) the title *AMAZING STORIES* brings to the mind off-color visions of bems, weekend boatrides on the Martian Canals, and "that crazy Buck Rogers stuff." It is my opinion that the names *AMAZING STORIES* and *FANTASTIC STORIES* are hurting the sales of your magazines.

I can't suggest anything drastic right now; I don't have any ideas for new titles at this time, and there would be pounds of protest from loyal fans who like the present titles. But the least you could do is to change *Amazing Stories* to *Amazing Science Fiction*. That would at least help somewhat at newsstands where only the spines of your magazine are shown.

A title change wouldn't solve all your problems, but it could do a great deal of help.

Jim Meadows III

62 Hemlock Street

Park Forest, Ill., 60466

There are some pretty obvious reasons why we can't, and won't, drop the "Amazing" from our title, I'm afraid. But a year ago we added the "Science Fiction" and this issue we've enlarged it slightly. Next issue we'll see what we can do about the spine. -TW

Dear Ted,

Our main topic of discussion has seemed to be general package and cover in particular, and in this area I can honestly say that the two most recent issues (May and July) have brought major upswings in both general and specific areas. As poor as I said the Jones January cover was—three white splotches on a dull blue field—the May cover is that good. Not all that different in design and style from the January cover, but this one looks *good*, and works as a grabber, while the other just didn't make it in either area—it didn't look (to my eyes)

especially good, and it certainly didn't immediately catch the attention of the casual newsstand buyer. And the entire July package, as you've mentioned, is indeed a great improvement over the previous format. I don't think the specific Adkins cover used is especially good, but the cover layout, cover stock, and interior paper quality are *noticeably* better. I only wonder how much these format changes are costing you, and if the magazine, in its present precarious state, can afford even this additional cost.

Um . . . who is Bill Graham? And more important, is the illo on 81 of the May issue indicative of his talents? If so, he is decidedly inferior to most of your other interior artists. Decidedly.

The portfolio of covers and concurrent historical discussion in your editorial are diverting, if nothing else; but I really wonder what the reader reaction will be. It would seem that such features, like all too many of those you've introduced, would appeal more to the fannish/collector mentality than the average reader mind. What has the reaction been to them so far? (*Favorable.*—TW)

Is what I believe I read in *Locus* true about the *Clubhouse* column being suspended while John is in Europe this summer? If so, this would indeed be a shame; I don't know if more than one current prozine can afford a fanzine review column, but I think that this one has become important and somewhat respected in most fannish circles, even among those who rarely agree with Johnny's opinions on fanzines. Certainly someone should be available, willing to write for very little or nothing—I know of a dozen writers who would drool at the opportunity. Or is it rather a case of seriously wanting to devote the space to something else, and this being a convenient way to at least temporarily phase the section out?

Interestingly, the ending of *The Day*

After Judgement could well be construed as answering Mr. Leavitt's cavil, and at the same time not invalidating the ending of *Black Easter*. Of course, in plain English it comes down to the old "If Satan displaces God, he would find it necessary to take on the aspects of the deity" thing, but I think Blish managed to pull it off quite well. Thus God is in fact dead, but because Satan is acting in his place, magic still functions.

Ted, you might have mentioned *SingOut* to the reader who asked about folk-music fanzines; although officially a professional magazine, *S.O.* is so badly distributed and so informally oriented as to be nearly a fanzine in spirit, if not in actuality.

I was afraid that that single-column art format was imposed by finances, like seemingly everything else. Too bad. And no, I didn't *really* think the Jones cover was a flying saucer, and I have no doubt that the painting originally was beautiful. But I really don't think it worked as a cover, and everyone I talked to both here and at various conventions agreed with that point. As a matter of interest to both of us—how well did that particular issue sell, especially in comparison with the May issue with a far better (to my mind) cover? (*About the same.*—TW)

The July issue, specifically now.

Ideally, I think, the cover format for this issue is about the best you've come up with so far; it's essentially the same, of course, to that used on (I think) your "Wolf Quest" cover for *FANTASTIC*. Since you're required by the publishers to list all authors and major features on the cover, it would seem perhaps the most logical to clearly acknowledge this necessity. Thus instead of merely superimposing the titles and authors over an existing painting, design as you've done here a cover with these things in mind, thus producing a cover that satisfies Mr. Cohen, is good-looking and professional in and of

itself, and features a good and unobscured cover painting. Nicely done, sir.

(Of course, as I said before I don't especially care for this particular Adkins illo, but . . .)

Ted, one reason for the continued excellence of your editorials seems to be your candor and honesty in personally involving yourself in the topics you're discussing. In a technique much more common to fanzine editorials than those in "professional" magazines, you talk about the magazine and/or society, bringing in your own personal experiences and reminiscences (especially in this case) to add to and support your argument. This not only works as simple corroborative testimony, but it makes the reader feel you give a damn about what you're discussing—and that you seriously want the reader to read and think about this material. You're not simply writing for an amorphous mass audience—you're talking to readers you assume have the intelligence to listen. And all this gives your editorials, I think, an influence far beyond their brevity and relative infrequency. This current editorial, concerning pornography and your experiences with it, is a perfect example of all this.

Franklin Ford's review of *Mount to the Stars* is so good it's worthy of reprint. Would that a few more fan writers would be willing to write with this critical attitude toward the very pretentious fanzines of the MTTS mold. As a matter of fact, would that "Ford" would do a few more fanzine reviews for you! How about letting him take over the column while Johnny's gone? (*He's too busy.* —TW)

You may well be right about the influences behind the basic constructions of Ursula LeGuin's novels; certainly the idea makes excellent sense, and is not in any way contradicted by her extant fiction. This could also give a rational basis for the great differences from novel to novel with her, both in topic and ease of reading.

Besides all other differences, *Left Hand of Darkness* is *much* harder to read than *Wizard of Earthsea*; I know many people who have been unable to get past the first few chapters of the former, while quickly reading and highly enjoying the latter. Consider it as a long, involved Sturgeon novel, and you might well have a good point (although, on the other hand, one friend who has been unable to get into LHoD is a confirmed Sturgeon freak).

Success has *certainly* helped Vonnegut—he gets more money per novel, and thus is able to worry more about his writing, and less about the grocery money this will bring in. Certainly success *can* change any person, but the creative person with a good grip on himself can only profit by it, as he becomes more and more able to spend the time necessary to perfect his material. Look at the recent work of Silverberg and Brunner, both common to these pages; finally able to put more time into their novels, both writers are turning out book after book of superb fiction, fiction they just didn't have time to write during the writing-for-bread-and-butter days. And I wonder if Kubrick would have even heard of Clarke, let alone want to make a film with him, without Clarke's commercial and popular success. Success can be the measure of a man, true—but in this field, it can also lead to great creative and artistic successes.

Jerry Lapidus

54 Clearview Drive

Pittsford, N.Y., 14534

I try to avoid repetitive cover formats as much as possible, but in any case the treatment of any given cover is usually dictated by the nature of the painting. Some artists leave large empty areas for logo and type; some do not. Adkins' July cover painting left little room, but did lend itself to cropping vertically so that we could put the type in the white strip down the left side. His September cover did not

present any problems: the type and logo fit it nicely. Mike Hinge's November painting was full of detail and the only way we could use it was to frame it and put the type outside. Pederson's cover this issue left plenty of room for logo and type. Etc. If we tried to stick consistently to a single format, not only would our covers tend to lose impact from the repetition but some of the paintings would suffer. Next issue, by the way, will be another Todd/-Bodé cover, this time illustrating a new Panshin story, "Sky Blue."—TW

Dear Mr. White.

In reading *Galaxy*, *If*, and *FandSF*, (I refuse to read *Analog* because of my great dislike of John W. Campbell) I have discovered that these magazines are very cold and impersonal as far as their readers are concerned. Could this be because they are so large they haven't the time to spend with individual readers?

Also, the before-mentioned mags are very rigid in format and hardly ever experiment. Thusly, they get to be quite boring.

The above two faults do not seem to apply to your mags however! Unlike all those other mags you seem to pay at least some credence to the readers' gripes. Witness the improvement of your covers from stinky unimaginative re-print things of a while ago, to the fantastic covers you now display! (Although perhaps you can explain the presence of one of the 'divers' from the film *Fantastic Voyage* on the cover of the Sept. '71 issue!)

Now I shall proceed to find out just how considerate you are to your readers. Ever since I read my first SF book (*Rocket Ship Galileo* by Heinlein, in case you were curious) I have been writing SF stories for the enjoyment of myself and my friends. (By now you are probably thinking—"Oh no! Another one of those aspiring SF authors looking for help!!!!") Well the other night I thought of sending one of my

stories to you when the thought zapped me: "I haven't the slightest idea what form the manuscript should be in!" Could you tell me just what the specifications for stories sent to you are?

Oh yes, I have but one suggestion for you. Why don't you get someone to do SF film reviews? (On such recent films as *THX-1138*, *The Andromeda Strain*, *Escape From The Planet of the Apes*, etc.)

I think you have the responsibility of covering all SF media!

Dave Ainsworth
11138 Welby Way
No. Hollywood, Cal. 91606

I'm printing your letter, Dave, instead of giving it a personal reply, because it typifies a percentage of the letters I receive, asking for advice, etc., and, hopefully, one reply here will suffice for all of you—for a while. The basic form for a manuscript for submission to any professional magazine is much the same. It should be typewritten, double-spaced (just as should be the letters you send me for this department), and free enough from misspellings or strikeouts to impress the editor as the work of someone sufficiently literate to be considered further. The first page of the manuscript (or ms.) should have your name and address and the estimated wordage of the story in either the top right-hand or top left-hand corner. The story's title should appear about one-third of the way down the page, followed, immediately below, by the by-line you wish to have used with the story (the version of your name you want used, or a pseudonym). Skip another several lines (to somewhere at or just below the middle of the page) and begin your story. Paragraphs should be indented five spaces from the left.

Frankly this is all the sort of thing you should already know if you're serious about writing. It can be found in any standard reference work on writing. But

the last time I mentioned that in these pages several readers pounced on me for my "arrogance" and presumption—not everyone, they pointed out, had such references handy. I suppose not. Your letter, in its original typewritten form, brings up another related point. You spaced twice between each word (and twice inside parentheses too), and I assume this is because you took "double-spaced" to require this. (Don't be embarrassed; you weren't the first.) There is no need to double-space between words (except at the end of a sentence, where it is customary to space twice after the period); the "double-spacing" requested is between lines—this allows a copyeditor room for his corrections and makes the ms. easier for the typesetter to read and follow. If you have any further questions about proper typing, I suggest you check the typing instruction books used in schools or available as paperbacks in the reference section of most larger newsracks (next to the dictionaries) which include proper forms for secretaries, etc.

And, oh yes: if Heinlein's works have had a positive influence upon your writing you'll find easy acceptance in almost all the sf markets. —TW

Dear Ted,

The letters and your responses to them in the September, 1971 issue raised a point that has been troubling me over the past several months. You stated that you had written five stories for the sequel to *Dangerous Visions*, and that Harlan Ellison had rejected all of them; furthermore, that these stories "... have not been easy to market elsewhere." Now that two have appeared in *AMAZING*, you have been accused of "self-perpetration" in the letter which immediately followed your statement.

"A Girl Like You" and "Growing Up Fast in the City" are as good as any run-of-the-mill short story that has appeared

in an issue with them (perhaps Harlan Ellison's reasons for rejecting them are known only to himself). However, when an editor chooses to publish his own works in his magazines, they had better be of superior quality if the editor is to avoid the Accusation; and the other comments concerning those stories were "the best" and "excellent." It would seem that your courage in printing them was justified.

Chris James

731 Louisiana St.

Lawrence, Kansas 66044

P. S. Do you know when Ellison's sequel, *Again Dangerous Visions*, is going to be published? It was supposed to be out in December 1970—Ipsedixit.

Again, Dangerous Visions grew too large for a single volume and fissioned into that title and The Last Dangerous Visions, which, Harlan advises me, is still open for a few laggards like myself whom he wants to see included. With luck you'll be seeing the first volume fairly soon—perhaps even by the time you read this. —TW

Dear Ted,

A very strange thing happened when I looked at the September *AMAZING*. Upon first seeing the cover, it appeared to be one of your best since taking over the magazine—brilliant colors, slick paper, heavy stock, fine layout, and a good drawing. And then I looked up close, and my god, what happened? The paste-up job is terrible—you can clearly see the borders around the moon and the central figure, where they were cut out and attached to the background. And the background looks like it was done in black magic marker! Is this merely a case of the printing picking up details it shouldn't have, or what? I've just never seen this happen on a "professional" magazine before.

This almost certainly isn't true, but I'll put it down anyway. Reading Silverberg's

"The Second Trip," I couldn't escape the feeling that he'd written the novel after reading Heinlein's recent bomb, *I Will Fear No Evil*. So much of the novel sounds just as if Silverbob read the Heinlein novel, said to himself "I can do this a lot better" and proceeded to do just that. He took ideas he'd played with in "Passengers" and *To Live Again*; combined them with Heinlein's basic idea in IWFNE, and produced an interesting, very readable little novel. I just couldn't get away from this feeling, illogical as it probably is. Could there possibly be any validity in the idea? (Bob? —TW)

I'm rather surprised at the ferocity with which you attack Delany's *Quark/1* in your review here—especially since, if I read you correctly, you actually found most of the fiction at the very least interesting. Virtually all of your review is devoted to the graphics, design (or lack of same), the introduction, and Delany's critical essay—though the fiction is the major and most important section of the volume. Now I do have to agree with you about the mediocre art (I could name 30 fanzines with better artwork in general) and some of the losses in design, but I feel you spend far too much time and space on what is essentially not concerned with the fiction itself. And I do think you miss the boat on at least one point. You note that stories are "signed" only at the end, not at the beginning, and put this down to "sloppiness" on the part of the editors. That seems highly doubtful; if they *wanted* the authors' names at the beginnings of the stories, I'm sure they could have put them there quite easily. I felt that this was deliberate; I can't be certain of the motives involved, but it would seem to ask that the reader concentrate more on the stories themselves—and not on whether they were written by this big-name writer or that new Clarion alumnus. Certainly this idea is borne out by the covers, which list *all* the

contributors in alphabetical order in small type. It's one thing to call this a bad idea, a bad concept; it's entirely another to call it "sloppiness," when it seems obvious that it's not the case.

But it's the fiction that makes up the main part of the magazine, and here I feel Delany comes out well. I found everything readable, several excellent, and almost everything more than usually interesting; \$1.25 may be a lot to pay, but if this collection isn't worth that, then I would say most magazines aren't worth even half that. Certainly there's too much emphasis on writing for writing's sake, and too many competent but basically pointless "stories." But overall, I find the volume quite promising; I haven't had the chance to read the second and third volumes yet, so we'll see if this promise has been fulfilled soon.

Somehow, I find the abbreviation of "profanity" far more annoying than the elimination of it altogether. If a magazine doesn't want to print certain words, for whatever reason, I don't like it, but I don't notice it, either. I may wonder why a certain author's stories seem especially "tame" in a particular magazine as compared to the rest of his output, but that's all. But to see *Galaxy* (or anyone) using idiocy like "s--k," "f--k," or whatever, is the height of insanity. This means they want to be able to use a word, but don't want to have to face up to any responsibility or consequences such use might entail, don't want to lose their lily-white image, or whatever. I personally felt Silverbob's novel was more believable simply because people "talked" the way people really do talk (honest, E.J.!); I would have found the *Galaxy* method cheap, and a definite intrusion into the story. You're reading along, and suddenly you come upon a word like that, and you're caught up and brought out of the story, reminded that the publishers don't have the guts to

print what the author wrote. Most sf is fragile enough, and such action can easily destroy a story and its impression on the reader entirely.

After C. V. Blane's letter, there wasn't anything I could do except pull down the May AMAZING and find out what all the shouting was about. So I just read "Growing Up Fast in the City." Nice little story; near-future urban life, nicely extrapolated, very possible, even probable. Another brief pause, to read "A Girl Like You." A little too clichéd, I think not as hard-hitting and as personal as "Growing Up." Frankly, I really don't see what Blane's objections are. Certainly if he considers your story pornography, he's led an incredibly sheltered life, and would probably consider a large percentage of the writing in the past 50 years pornography. As for it not being sf—it's quite obvious from even a cursory reading that the events take place in a near-future society, a basic prerequisite for science fiction. Or didn't he notice this? It isn't worth it, except for the fact that Blane's prejudices may influence others against the magazine, whether by this letter (although I doubt that!) or by personal contact. And *that* would be a shame, just as the magazine is beginning to carve itself a solid spot in the limited prozine field.

And then in Scott Edelstein's letter, another comment about one of your stories, an objection on the grounds that "A Girl Like You" is not science fiction. Again, here's a near-future society, one in which (though perhaps unlikely) the whites have occupied the central cities and the blacks the suburbs and rural areas. Elements of the same idea present in *The Jagged Orbit*—so why the objections? I don't really understand them at all. One can easily not *like* the stories, but they seem to be undeniably sf. Ditto with "Growing Up."

So. It seems while more and more sf is

being published, the regular writers are not benefiting. You've improved both AMAZING and FANTASTIC immensely, and yet can't get sales because of poor distribution. And I just got a letter of comment on *Tomorrow And . . .* [Jerry's fan magazine] from John Brunner, saying among other things how, despite a Hugo, award nominations, and many hardcover sales, Brunner is still forced to do quickie novels, just to keep solvent. A terrible situation, all around. Best of luck with the magazine, and with the Hugos in Boston.

Jerry Lapidus
54 Clearview Drive
Pittsford, N.Y. 14534

You bring up a number of items for comment this time, Jerry, so I'll try to cover them as briefly as possible. First, the Adkins cover was an assemblage, artfully touched up, which the engraver in some manner totally botched, I would guess by using the wrong lighting angles. The background(space) should have been solid black—it was on the original—and was not done with magic marker in any case. (The engraver also earned my wrath for repositioning the type on the October FANTASTIC cover over the figure, but I'm so pleased with the good job done on the November issue of this magazine that I've forgiven him.) To make matters worse, the printing greyed out on some copies, making the background even greyer yet. Oh well; win some, lose some. Second, the review of Quark/1 devotes almost a page, out of a two-page review, to discussing the fiction in some detail, but I was dealing not simply with a collection of stories but a total entity, the style and tone of which was dominated by those other points on which I spent my time. It was the editors' decision to emphasize the "graphics" of the book, not mine; it is I think the legitimate function of a reviewer to comment

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Edited by
DICK LUPOFF & DON THOMPSON

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(Continued from page 4)

of what the baby will be like is "settled" at conception. Its genetic heritage is fixed by the combination of sperm cell and egg cell; no more. The diet of the prospective mother will have a crucial influence on what the baby will actually be like—vitamin imbalances can decisively effect the baby's bone structure, organ development, and health. To the extent to which the mother controls her own daily health she is also controlling that of her embryonic child. It may be true that she cannot literally "design" her child, but this analogy—with writers, inventors, etc.—is meaningless in any event. It hardly has any bearing at all on the way a writer writes a book to compare it with a pregnancy, a point with which I'm sure most mothers and writers would agree.

Consider writing a book—even a book such as Skinner's. Is it true that the author "didn't initiate anything"? That the books which I, for example, have written are simply "the effect of past history" on me? Well, clearly I would not have written the books I've written had not any number of others written books before me. I *am* to some extent the product of my influences. But a pretty diverse lot of writers—from Philip K. Dick to Raymond Chandler—have ranked as influences on my writing, and in most cases I doubt my work could be confused with theirs. A lot of rubbish has been talked about "the muse" which writers draw upon, but it is equally rubbish to speak of a writer as a sort of funnel through which "past history" manifests its works. The truth is surely more complex.

Why bother mentioning this? Skinner is a man who obviously has little appreciation for the subtle interrelationship between man and his environment—he sees the relationship as one of the *impact* upon men by their *controllable* environments. His own daughter spent her first two and a half years in an isolated, air-conditioned,

germ-free box. She is now described as "shy." The wonder is that she isn't autistic.

Common-sense refutes most of Skinner, and suggests that man is sufficiently resilient to overcome even Skinner's Orwellian notion of what's good for him.

Common-sense also gives the lie to Dr. Clark, whose suggestion that we tranquilize our leaders smacks to me of little more than headline-grabbing. Drugs which influence our thoughts and emotions are closer in use to the arts of primitive witchcraft than they are to a logical science. The effect of a drug upon any randomly selected *specific* person is nearly unpredictable, as pharmacologists could easily point out. While their effects are known for a cross-section of the population which is arbitrarily assumed to be *average*, individual physiology is full of loopholes and exceptions. Thus, the sweeping generalizations about the so-called psychedelic drugs—made both by their admirers and their detractors—are usually (but not always) true, but only in specific instances, in relation to specific people and settings.

Getting back to Dr. Clark's suggestion, that world leaders should be required to take "psychotechnological medication," it's pretty obvious that he is presuming an ideal state-of-the-art in pharmacology which simply has not as yet been attained. I have no doubt that trial and error experimentation with each "world leader" would ultimately lead to the right dosages of the right drugs to achieve what Dr. Clark has in mind. What I do doubt is that any man in his right mind to begin with would allow himself to be tampered with in such terms, and I doubt the wisdom of anyone who seriously considers it.

After all, what precisely is "aggressive behavior"? Is it not rather inextricably tied in with the sort of drive, forcefulness of thought and willingness to accept vast responsibility which we demand of our leaders? Could we "curb their aggressive

behavior" without clouding their minds irretrievably? Might not we end up with a world governed by a collection of senile President Eisenhowers, unwilling to face the challenge of genuine crises, too willing to let things slide "as they are"? To what extent can we consider the chemical control of our leaders, anyway? *Who* prescribes the drugs? Who decides the prescription is right? And who prescribes for *them*?

Both Clark and Skinner appear convinced the world is in trouble. Both have offered solutions. Both solutions are simple-minded to the point of unworkability. Skinner at least has articulated his ideals. Only a genuine working definition of Human Being is lacking in his equations. Clark is simply blue-skying—giving voice to a notion more than one long-haired freak has suggested without seriousness in the past, "Boy would I like to turn on/slip some acid into that guy." (Grace Slick, of the Jefferson Airplane rock group, planned to spike Tricia Nixon's tea with LSD; it's just as well she never had the chance. Not only is it a violation of the ethics of the genuine drug-culture—which state that a man must choose his own poison—but it probably would not have "enlightened" or "opened up" the unsuspecting victims at all. When the dip at a Los Angeles party was spiked with acid a year or so ago, the antics of the unsuspecting victims—largely from the "straight" world—made headlines, but it's hard to believe that the cause of Good was advanced one iota.)

Turning to Poul Anderson's "More Futures Than One" is a relief. I could have done without the guided-tour-of-a-day-in-the-future format, and some of Poul's examples of *The Good Life* strike me as rather superficial (if not cliché—we've heard about the joyous world of the computer before, many times before—see *The Science in Science Fiction* last issue), but

his basic point is a good one, and one which bears underlining:

As technology advances and we shift from a work-ethic culture to a pleasure-ethic culture, room for diversity increases, rather than diminishing. We are not, nor will we ever be, one homogenized "global village," one mass-cult responding either to the enlightened administration of drugs or the enlightened administration of reward—stimuli. We are a diverse people, and if our differences can be recognized without the necessity for friction, they can be capitalized upon. And should be.

What Anderson realizes and Skinner does not is that humanity, collectively, needs escape valves. It requires the opportunity for *change*. Change of scene, change of circumstances, change of mind. We have exhausted most of our frontiers on this planet (but not yet all of them; just those which offer some ease of accessibility); we must redefine our frontiers. New challenges await us. Individually we need to realize this, to realize that if our present lives are hemmed-in and increasingly unbearable there *are* alternatives available and accessible.

As Anderson's title implies, the world he has described is not the only possible future. Nor will the realization of the future he described follow his blueprint. He knows this; he takes this for granted. But Anderson, like most science fiction writers, knows that the future is not fixed. It is what we make of it.

And the alternative he presents is vastly preferable to that of drugged submission or life in a Skinner box.

LAST ISSUE, in blurbing Terry Carr's story, "In His Image," I said that he "spends much of his time editing the *ACE Science Fiction Specials*." This is, sadly, no longer true.

Not so very long ago, as I write this, I was talking to Terry on the phone, and,

in the course of other topics of mutual interest, he said, "I left Ace Books today." He said it quietly and without apparent emotion, calmly stating a fact.

It was the not completely unexpected end to a briefly brilliant career. Hired in the mid-sixties by Don Wollheim to be his editorial assistant, Carr very quickly revealed an editorial talent which led to his own position as a full editor (one of only three at Ace), and the inauguration of the Specials soon after.

The Ace Science Fiction Specials (not Carr's own desired name for the special series) were a unique line of books and an enduring testament to the quality of Carr's editorial vision. Each year for the short period of their existence, the Specials dominated the awards presented in the science fiction field—both the Nebula Awards and the Hugos. Carr pried new books from old masters (like Wilson Tucker) and startling books from new discoveries (several of whom, like Gordon Eklund, first appeared in the pages of this magazine and its sister publication, *FANTASTIC STORIES*). I can't say I liked them all—and there are probably not many among us who did—but like everyone else I was impressed by the overall high quality of the books and Carr's willingness to take chances with newer, younger writers, most of whom repaid his gamble handsomely.

During this same period, however, A.A. Wynn, the owner and founder of Ace Books, died and the company was sold by his heirs to the Charter Communications Corporation. In the ensuing year or two there was a nearly total turnover among the Ace employees, only the three editors remaining of the old guard.

The last year has not been a healthy one for publishing—as I've noted before. It was apparently no more healthy for Ace, which had picked this inopportune moment to branch out from the old staples of genre fiction (sf, westerns, nurse novels

and gothics) into "best sellers." Ace had grown fat on genre fiction, and was in fact the acknowledged leader in that area among all paperback publishers, but the beachhead on the mainstream proved disastrous.

Or, as one New York agent put it, "Look, suppose you pay \$75,000 for a novel—and that's not a high advance for a would-be best-seller—and it only earns back \$55,000 in sales. You've just lost \$20,000, or the purchase price of ten to fifteen sf novels, or fifteen to twenty westerns or nurse novels, each of which would have paid their own unspectacular way. But suppose you don't look at it that way. Suppose you just look at sales. That book you lost twenty thou on has sold maybe a quarter of a million, maybe even more. But that science fiction novel which just won the Nebula has sold only 50,000 copies. So you drop the sf, because 'it isn't selling as well.'"

There's more to it than that. The Ace regular sf hasn't been affected; Don Wollheim is now moving into the management level of the company. But the handwriting was on the wall last spring when Carr was informed that Ace was tightening its belt and he, junior among the three editors, would lose his job. He appealed this decision and management reconsidered, giving him the Specials line to edit on what amounted to a free-lance basis.

In many respects this suited Terry admirably. It freed him from the routine of a Manhattan office and he made plans for returning to the West Coast to live. The position would pay less (he was giving up his other editorial duties), but he'd have greater time to write (an arrangement which led to the cover-story assignment here last issue, and another story we've purchased from him since).

However, soon after he left the office and began working from his home, his position at Ace began to erode. His edito-

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(Continued from page 127)

rial budget was slashed, undercutting his bargaining position in bidding for important new sf books. Then he was told his books would no longer be labeled "Ace Science Fiction Specials" and would simply be distributed as part of the regular monthly Ace sf offering (the distinctive uniform packaging had already been dropped). And finally he was told that he would need editorial approval within the company before making any new purchases—effectively reducing him to the position of editorial assistant again. And finally the logic of the situation led someone within the company to ask the inevitable question: Why do we need a freelance editor to edit one book a month when

a regular editor must oversee the operation anyway? At that point the axe finally fell, and the attenuated thread was severed.

Well, it's a chancy business, all around. Editorial positions often appear to be handled like a game of musical chairs. Some editors seem to trade companies almost yearly. Should we shed a tear because another editor lost his job?

Terry Carr is an old friend, and maybe I identify too strongly with the way in which he was so neatly "aced" out of his job. But most of you will join me, I think, in mourning the passing of a unique line of books, already in too short a time a special tradition within our field.

—TED WHITE

(Continued from page 123)

on all aspects of a book of this nature, excluding only cover blurbs and the like. You refer to Quark/ as a "magazine," thus underlining my own point. For the record, however, I believe I would have rejected at least 50% of the stories published in Quark/1, had they been submitted here. Had I been editing a publication similar to Quark/ (and with an equal budget), the rejection rate would have been closer to 75%. Third, I rather hope (but doubt) that Henry Harris and Geo. Brown will read your comments on profanity. When Silverberg sent me "The Second

Trip," he told me that he hoped I wouldn't make any "tame" substitutions or substitute dashes in the novel, and I told him I would not. His reasons were largely the same as those you mentioned here. And, finally, by now you know that the Hugo went again this year to The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, with AMAZING placing third after runner-up Analog. This is a virtual repeat of last year's Hugo awards, but we're not ashamed to have placed third again—after too many years of being out of the running altogether.—TED WHITE

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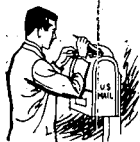
Apt. No. _____

City &
State _____

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If you had mailed this coupon a year ago, perhaps your salary would be up too!



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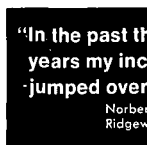
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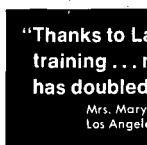
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